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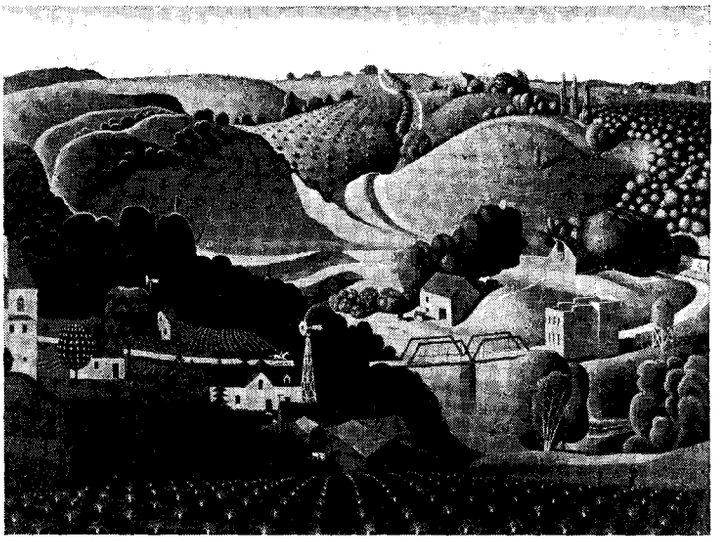
# I Look at American Fiction

BY PHYLLIS BENTLEY



"'A novel of Iowa,' 'hardships of the Oregon trail,' 'a romantic tale of Minnesota home life,' 'the West in the great days'—I culled all these from a mere three columns of one of the Sunday book supplements" . . . (Stone City, by Grant Wood.)

THE cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces, the solemn temples, of Manhattan Island fade before my reluctant eyes as the Eastbound ship goes down the Bay, and America, from being a permeating element I breathed, becomes an external phenomenon I can see in perspective, a piece of geography on the map. Can I, before the terrible preoccupations of Europe rise and fill my mind, shape my perceptions of American fiction into a similarly coherent whole? I'm not sure that I can; but a few detached impressions clamor strongly to be recorded.

A lecture tour in the last three months has taken me into—or at least through—some thirty-five out of the forty-eight states, and wherever my schedule allowed me to pause long enough for conversation, I have inquired concerning the local writers. It is natural, therefore, that one of my strongest impressions of American fiction should be that of a robust regionalism. A glance at the publishers' advertisements of a Sunday confirms me in this view. "A novel of Iowa," "hardships of the Oregon trail," "dramatic tale of Minnesota home life," "the West in the great days"—I culled all these from a mere three columns of one of the Sunday book supplements a few days ago. Discussing this regionalism with my friend, Mrs. May Lamberton Becker, she reminded me of that fine passage in Rostand's "Chantecler," where the cock explains how he plants his feet firmly on his native soil, waits for the strength of the earth to rise up through his body to his throat, and then announces the coming of the dawn for his own valley. The passage describes with symbolic truth the art of the regional novelist in every country.

But unfortunately in England nowadays one is never the first on one's chosen dungheap—the literary sun has been summoned to rise on one's native earth many times before. For indeed almost every square yard of English soil has already been sung in fiction. If one wishes to write of Wessex, for example, one feels some hesitation, remembering that one has been forestalled by Hardy; in my own county of Yorkshire, writers today are always compared, necessarily to their disfavor, with their great Brontë predecessors. In America it is not so; whole states yet lack expression; happy the novelist living in an era where so much material lies fresh, untouched, to his hand. It is only to be hoped that the pioneer novelist will use his material with a less wasteful exploitation than some of the actual pioneers on American soil; it would be a pity if the traditions, the folklore, the stories, of too many states were hurriedly shoveled into fiction to make contemporary best sellers, leaving only stale and impoverished fields, diminished forests, for the subsistence of future writers. But meanwhile a great opportunity lies open to the young American novelist, and he is not slow to take it. An instructive catalogue might be prepared by a librarian with time on his hands, of this regional literature; for my own part, on my way to and from the various states, in an attempt to prepare myself for what I am to see or to interpret what I have seen, I study eagerly the novels of such writers as Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Phil Stong, Rachel Field, and so on, for the sun rises for me over their chosen regions as I read.

The international crisis, which is reshaping not only the map but the literature of Europe, is having its effect on American literature too. A sudden strong consciousness of the American idea is very apparent to the outside observer today, both in American life and in American literature. This articulate expression of concern for the American faith perhaps began with Sinclair Lewis's "It Can't Happen Here"; it continues, and gains constantly in volume, in both major and minor works. The number and popularity of books dealing with American history, both in fiction and non-fiction, seems another facet of this contemporary characteristic, for a nation becomes most conscious of its great past, when it feels that past in danger. It is not without significance, I think, that though I began to visit America in 1934, it was not till March 1939 that I heard "The Star-Spangled Banner" played in public. Perhaps I am mistaking for a contemporary movement what is really a permanent characteristic of the national temper, but it seems to me there is a very real difference in this respect of articulate patriotism between the fiction of say, 1929, and that of 1939.

A frequent (and very natural) question asked me by reporters seeks to elicit the names of my favorite contemporary American novelists. I am obliged to reply, with very genuine sorrow, that my favorite contemporary American novelist is no longer alive; this (naturally) irritates the reporters, but I cannot help it. For I cannot yet regard Thomas Wolfe as anything but contemporary, and to me he seems as far above the other American writers of the day in mental as he actually was, I am told, in physical stature. I have not yet seen his last work, "The Web and the Rock." But the poetry of the man's work, its fire, its power, its perception of universal truth, its *living* quality, so that the book almost seemed to pulsate in your hand

## Next Week

AMERICA IN MIDPASSAGE
By CHARLES A. and MARY R. BEARD
*Reviewed by Elmer Davis*

WORDS AND MUSIC
By STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT

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as you held it—always as I read I thought of hot lava rolling in inexorable fiery tumult down the slopes of a volcano, while the noise of the eruption thundered overhead. Yes, Wolfe's genius really seemed to me vast enough and powerful enough to express America. His death is a most deplorable loss to world literature.

A writer whose work I always hasten to read, though in a state of mingled joy and exasperation, is William Faulkner. His prose is mingled fire and smoke; sometimes the fire seems worth the smoke and sometimes it just doesn't, as coughing, choking, with one hand outstretched groping despairingly for some solid meaning to which one might cling, one gasps one's way through a row of obscure pall-laden pages. Sometimes, too, one feels that the whole novel consists of a single sentence—one hardly dare pause to take breath lest one should lose grip of its solitary verb. To a practical north-country Englishwoman, Faulkner's world seems strangely lurid, fury-haunted; one emerges from a Faulkner novel staggering, disheveled, very conscious that one's emotions have received the Aristotelian purge. After an hour or two, when one has grown calmer, one grows a little incredulous too. To me Faulkner's work seems just to fail of greatness by its lack of universality. Reading Ellen Glasgow's "Barren Ground" last night I came across this sentence in the preface: "I had resolved that I would write of the South not sentimentally, as a conquered province, but dispassionately, as a part of the larger world." I speak, of course, as an Englishwoman, a stranger, one whose ancestors had no part in the great quarrel and who has therefore no right to judge the quality of those who maintain its persistence; but it does seem to me that until Faulkner changes from the first to the second of these attitudes, steps back a little, as it were, from his material, he is too close to it to see its real truth.

Ernest Hemingway, whose earlier work seemed to mark the dawn of modern American fiction, has disappointed me of late. He seems to have fallen a victim to his own technique. We must, however, remain deeply grateful to him for having introduced that technique to American literature, for I believe it is a technique very specially suitable for the presentation of American life. To explain what I mean by this statement, I shall have to enlarge a little on my views both of Hemingway's technique and American life, and I ask my readers' indulgence if what I have to say on these points seems mistaken or redundant; I am offering merely a personal view.

There are two kinds of narrative in fiction. One kind consists in describing an action exactly as it has occurred (in the novelist's imagination), the moment it has occurred; we call this kind of narrative a "scene." The other kind consists in summarizing a series of actions for the reader's benefit; to this kind of narrative we haven't yet allotted an agreed name, it is sometimes called a summary, sometimes a panorama. Some critics indeed call it merely "narrative," but this nomenclature, implying as it does that scenic fiction is not narrative, is a mistake. And a very important mistake, too, for I believe it has encouraged our more experimental novelists in their disuse of the summary; it has led them to believe that scene and summary are quite different species of writing, and not, as they really are, merely varieties of the same genus. Be that as it may, several novelists have recently made the experiment of rejecting the summary; they have decided to tell their tales in terms only of scene. The theory behind this decision has been well expressed by Mrs. Virginia Woolf, an early practitioner of the technique. "Examine for a moment," she writes (in a volume of essays collected in 1925):

> Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions . . . from all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms. . . . Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall . . .

"Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind, in the order in which they fall"—let the novelist, that is, record the actual present now, the direct experience, the single perception, the specific action, exactly as they happen, because life is composed of these single perceptions, these specific actions; life is not lived in summaries, therefore let us not summarize.

Now that, achieved quite independently of Mrs. Woolf, is the technique of Ernest Hemingway—or, at least, in his earlier novels it was the tendency of his technique; in his later novels it has become his technique in its entirety. A maximum use of scene, in his earlier novels, gave his work a vividness, a vigor, an intensity; for scene, the description of single specific actions just as they occur, always gives the reader a greater intensity of participation than a summary of events, which necessarily throws the events summarized into the past. But Hemingway has now brought his use of scene to a pitch which could only be justified by an extraordinarily sensitive perception of the feelings caused by the fall of the atoms; and this sensitive perception he does not give us, he seems content to record merely the external fact of their fall. Too much of Hemingway's later fiction consists of: I had a drink; she had a drink; he had a drink. Those actions are not worth recording one by one in monotonous repetition; surely it would be better to summarize, say simply that they all three got drunk, and go on promptly to something more interesting.

Now many other contemporary American writers use this "maximum of scene" technique. John Dos Passos has,

(*Continued on page* 14)

*Jerry Robinson*

**"A sudden strong consciousness of the American idea is very apparent to the outside observer" . . . (Audience at "The American Way," by Kaufman and Hart, rises in the last scene to sing "The Star-Spangled Banner.")**

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# Hope for Czechoslovakia

*WE SHALL LIVE AGAIN. By Maurice Hindus. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co.* 1939. $3.

Reviewed by HENRY C. WOLFE

WHEN Maurice Hindus entered Czechoslovakia last June, the German diplomatic-propaganda offensive against Central Europe's island of democracy was in full swing. By mobilizing on the week-end of May 21st, it is true, the Czechoslovaks had slowed down the German drive. But only for a few days. When the Nazis recovered from their May rebuff, they redoubled their political and military pressure against the land of Masaryk and Benes.

Mr. Hindus went to Czechoslovakia to study the people, their customs, their government, and their way of life. His knowledge of Russian enabled him to pick up the Czech language quickly. And his ability to talk directly with the people made it possible for him to go into remote parts of the country and converse with the simple folk as well as with the officials of the central government in Prague. This ability to get into intimate contact with the average man gives "We Shall Live Again" an advantage over nearly all the other books about Czechoslovakia written by Englishmen and Americans.

In this respect Mr. Hindus's book reminds the reviewer of Louis Adamic's "The Native's Return." Both writers take their readers into the homes, the churches, the wine festivals, and the weddings of peasants whom strictly political writers know little about. Here we have a close-up of life far removed from Prague.

> The man of the house, a thin-faced, thin-bodied, bright-eyed Slovak with a gleaming brownish mustache, showed us around his farm. His buildings were old, in need of repairs, and he had none of the modernized equipment which the other farmer had installed in his barns. But here too was evidence of a love of cleanliness. There were scarcely any cobwebs in his cow stables, his pigsty though small was clean and dry and so was his rabbit cage. He had no henhouse, and his chickens roosted on boards in the cow stable. These were scraped clean of droppings. Here too swallows flew about with gay abandon. They all believed in good luck, these humble and good-humored Slovaks.

The author spent only part of his time in the rural sections of the "citadel of humanitarianism." He was interested in the socio-economic forces at work for democracy in this Central European laboratory. His studies of social, political, and human Czechoslovakia were soon interrupted by the onslaught of Nazi *Machtpolitik*. The screaming crescendo of Hitler's propaganda warned everyone that the Reich's campaign against Czechoslovakia was reaching a stage of crisis. The Runciman mission had come to Prague. "There was martial law in parts of the Sudetenland; the German army was holding maneuvers within easy reach of the Czechoslovak border, and the Czechoslovak government was quietly calling up reserves." The Czechs and Slovaks were ready to fight. "Alone?" asked the author. Invariably came the answer: "We won't be alone. France and Russia will be with us, anyway."

The part of the book entitled "Doom" recounts the series of dramatic events that rushed one upon another through the turbulent days of September. Henlein fled to Germany; Czech refugees poured out of the Sudeten area; Lord Runciman went back to London. Mr. Hindus visited the frontier area along the German border. Everywhere he saw chaos—all the symptoms of a mad world. The Czechs were standing behind their guns ready to fight for their independence. But the little democracy's fate was being decided in London and Paris. Munich and the "peace with honor" followed. Later came the end of even the mutilated post-Munich Republic.

But Mr. Hindus does not lose hope. "Yet more firmly than ever do I believe that the present ordeal is only a phase of the checkered history of the Czechs. . . . They will live again!" Americans hope that time will vindicate the author's faith in historic justice and the strength of a sturdy people.

This book is one of those rare volumes which combine political insight and social appraisal. It seems to me even more enthralling than "Humanity Uprooted"—which is something of a record even for Mr. Hindus.

# Roots of the Tarheels

*PURSLANE. By Bernice Kelly Harris. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.* 1939. $2.50.

Reviewed by JONATHAN DANIELS

IN an agrarian South so much written about in the pretentious terms of the great plantation and in the pitiful terms of tenant farmers, Bernice Kelly Harris has found a truer, more typical people who, on her land, as on the pages of her "Purslane," live vigorous, vivid, and satisfying lives. They are as Southern as cotton-chopping and sweet potatoes, but their roots in the region make them also convincing and welcome Americans growing out of American land.

Mrs. Harris not only knows the tobacco-growing land east of Raleigh in North Carolina of which she writes; she has eye and ear and nose for every aspect of a country she loves. Color and smell and feel of the country and its kitchens, its churches and graveyards and plant beds mark every page. Understanding of the faults and virtues of all the Fullers and the Fuller kinfolks and the Fuller neighbors make a world of human characters as clear in their diversity as the inanimate world around them. Add together her big crowd of characters (from John Fuller, the steady father and farmer, to Cousin Sell, who lived by visiting, from day-dreaming Nanny Lou to ball-playing Calvin) and slowly, cumulatively, lives touching and matching lives, a whole and true community comes into existence and understanding. And it grows in a book which emphasizes beauty as well as backache and finds plenty for all in an energetic poverty even in the South.

There will undoubtedly be some who will feel that there is too little story about so many characters. The probability

Bernice Kelly Harris

is, however, that there is too much story. Of course a storyteller might have made a direct and compelling drama around the yearning of young Calvin for Millie. Such yearning is an old story and Mrs. Harris only injures her portraiture when she tries to pull drama and tragedy into her book, as in the amazingly bad last three or four pages. Fortunately the conclusion happens to be trivial in this book, and so an unimportant though glaring fault. Mrs. Harris makes pictures which of themselves are richly dramatic in their implications. It is a pity that she felt a need for more obvious dramatics. They mar a beautiful book but fortunately do not seriously interfere with appreciation of its high and unusual quality.

"Purslane" is both Mrs. Harris's first novel and the first novel to be published by the University of North Carolina Press.

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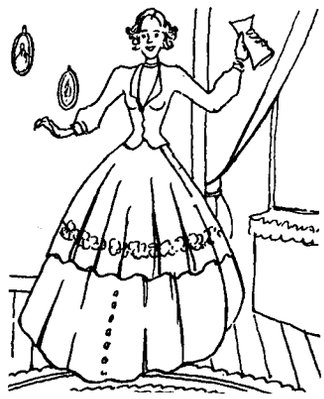
# Married to a Genius

*JANE WELSH CARLYLE. By Townsend Scudder. New York: The Macmillan Co. 1939. $3.50.*

Reviewed by CHARLES FREDERICK HARROLD

THE craft of fictionized biography has had its champions and its enemies, warring over its claims to esthetic and historical integrity. The argument has been curiously unproductive except of irritation. But once or twice in a season there appears a work which achieves the artistic feat of transmuting dead fact-material into what deserves no less a name than creative biography. Mr. Townsend Scudder has already, in "The Lonely Wayfaring Man," given proof of an ability to lift biographical narrative to the imaginative level without taking leave of fact, and without violating the truth of the total image in the original. His new book, "Jane Welsh Carlyle," is not without its faults—the severe critic will say that it lacks accent, and that it omits those darker and revelatory shadows which give a picture its complete dimensions; nevertheless, it is a brilliant example of what happens when a scholarly mind is gifted with an imagination which can handle a heavy mass of information with the shaping touch and the illumination of the story-teller.



Drawings from the jacket of "Jane Welsh Carlyle"

The author's materials, scrupulously accounted for in a ten-page Bibliographical Note, come out, in this book, in the form of vivid, sharply impressionistic units of a narrative which preserves its continuity by reflecting constantly the qualities of Jane Carlyle's personality—its crispness, its swift and bitter gayety, its many-sided appeal through paradox, and wit, and pathos. The narrative has the impelling momentum, the irresistible color, the arresting personalities of a novel. Yet all is faithful to the sources; the final picture, as well as the individual incident, shows remarkable fidelity to the bright and troubled life of Jane Carlyle. This is especially commendable in that the book is given a rich Victorian background—for example, the picture of old Chelsea, the interior at Cheyne Row, the weekends at the Grange; and there are memorable portraits or miniatures of Jeffrey, De Quincey, Edward Irving, Leigh Hunt, Mazzini, Lord Houghton, Dickens, Fitzgerald, Tennyson. Throughout the narrative, all is seen through Jane's eyes: her husband's titanic struggle with his genius and his times, the isolated life at Craigenputtock, Carlyle's burst of fame in London and all its consequences for her drawing room and her servants, and her own never-ending problem of how to live with a dyspeptic, inspired, explosive literary man. The story is focussed steadily on Mrs. Carlyle; even the tone of the narrative has at times an uncannily feminine ring. Real skill is shown in the firm subordination of literary incident to the needs of the narrative — Emerson's visit in 1833, the loss of the first volume of the "French Revolution"; and admirable control is evident in the handling of Carlyle's relations with Lady Ashburton.

It is possible to wonder at certain omissions. The compression of the Carlyles' curious five-year courtship into one short chapter is understandable in view of the general proportions of the book, but it will be regretted by many readers. Others will inquire about the lack of emphasis on that side of the Carlyles' married life which has no doubt been too often exploited but which was nevertheless a reality: the harsher aspects of Craigenputtock, where the belle of Haddington was plunged into house-work for a peasant with genius; the budgetary tangles which rose at times to anguished crescendos; and that mysterious period, during the writing of "Frederick," when Mrs. Carlyle's diary records, laconically, "The chief interest of to-day expressed in blue marks on my wrists!" These things are touched upon by Mr. Townsend, but only lightly, and without significant emphasis. It can be argued that to give them their due weight would alter the scope and tenor of the book, which is true. But the result is that, while the picture as a whole does no violence to facts, it remains, with all its admirable unity, a portrait with many high-lights but with inadequate shadows. The publisher's jacket, with its delicate tint and its quaint ink drawings, is indeed suggestive of the quality of the book: somehow more reminiscent of a romantic couple of the Regency than of the home-spun energetic Scotch couple who came to dominate so much in the Age of Earnestness.

Yet as a creative biography, judged on its own intention and performance, "Jane Welsh Carlyle" is by all odds the most vivid delineation we have had of that wistful, tart, audacious, and tragic hostess of Cheyne Row. Full of robust anecdote, mounting in intensity and detail with every richly-told incident, colorful with broad strokes of social portraiture, the book makes first-rate reading.

# "From My Country"

*LETTERS OF ASKANCE. By Christopher Morley. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company. 1939. $2.50.*

Reviewed by CHAUNCEY B. TINKER

THERE has always been about Christopher Morley something of the infectious gayety of boyhood. His gusto is insistent, boisterous, devoted to sharp-shooting and to preciosity of vocabulary. One must remember that he was nourished by that author who taught his clients that the world is so full of a number of things, we should all, he opined, be as happy as kings. ("Kings," quotha!). Well, readers are today just about as happy as the terrified monarchs who still sit on thrones, wondering how long it will be before they get a swift kick into Limbo. Meanwhile the sun rises and sets, spring returns, friends die, and for us laymen (as for kings) the dear old problem remains—how to get through the day. *Restat vivere.*

Now here is a book which should have been entitled, as volumes were a century and a half ago, "A Book for a Rainy Day," or "A Companion for a Leisure Hour," or "A Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla." It is so long since one has turned to our poets for charm or to our essayists for companionship that one opens Morley's "Letters of Askance" with a measure of astonishment; for the writer is content to enrich our lives rather than to revolutionize them, and to lead us by the hand rather than by the nose. Happy himself, he wishes to make his readers happy, too, and is blessedly unconcerned with propaganda, blatant or sly. He is not preaching communism or fascism or atheism or Buddhism. He does not even fear the charge of using literature as a "means of escape." What nobler function has poetry than this?

> I lead in my own mind a life inflammable, and in spite of my many obvious failures I have met no other thoughts (living or dead) with which I would exchange. Last night I had a remarkable dream, a reaction probably from angry immersion in small details. It was a wide and vivid fantasy: of a Doom of War, and of other matters both desperate and strange. The details of the vision are irrelevant here

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[but at this point the reviewer interrupts to inform the reader that those details may be found in any daily newspaper or weekly summary of current events], the point is that I rose from it with immediate gladness and power. It came, I said to myself, "From My Own Country," by which I meant the realm of the imagination. That is my only patriotism; every other kind is dangerous.

This, then, is Morley's creed, and one can but wonder what the newest school of poets will make of it. There is no body of writers narrower than these novices. They *have* to be narrow, to "sound a new note" or discover an original "manner." They are all tainted with the false doctrine which Mr. Morley quotes as set forth by an aspirant who "scorns the devices of his poetic elders and seeks by experimentation new and more dynamic verse forms." This youngster is a conventional member of the Wandering School; and to that group Mr. Morley has never belonged.

Long ago he was infected by his teachers at Haverford College (in particular by Gummere of happy memory) with a passion for English literature; and it is still, I think, the most significant thing about him. His knowledge of English poetry, as extensive as a professor's, has no air of academic dogmatism about it, but is as genuine and unexcused as a love of the sun or flowers or home. And the range of his affections is no less memorable. If he enjoys "Tottel's Miscellany," it is not at the expense of his delight in J. Gordon Coogler (whose acquaintance I owe to this volume), the author of "Purely Original Verse" (Columbia, S. C., 1897), containing the unforgettable lines,

She died after the beautiful snow had
melted,
And was buried beneath the slush.

Ah me! I will read my Morley faithfully, avidly, so long as he hunts down such verse for my delight.

And how sane he is, for all his gayety and nonsense. Read what he has to say about the composition of the strict sonnet and give thanks, for Morley has written excellent examples, and published them, too. Or take this as a specimen of diction:

> There never was a poet who made more deliberate, carefully aimed, purposeful, pachyderm and pedestrian attack upon futurity than the admirable Amy Lowell. She invaded Poetry like Hindenburg in France. She was massy with technique, armored with doctrine.

If you wish to read the rest, see page 195.

But let nobody ask the reviewer what the title, "Letters of Askance" may mean. Few of these essays are letters, and none, so far as I can see, has any sidelong or indirect glance at a meaning not freely expressed. *Askance* is not a noun. The phrase is said to come from Blythe, whom I do not know. I shall probably discover some day that it is from Wyatt or Surrey or Jeremy Taylor or Emily Dickinson. Meanwhile I am stumped. And I suspect that I was meant to be.

# Teddy Blue

*WE POINTED THEM NORTH. Recollections of a Cowpuncher. By E. C. Abbott and Helena Huntington Smith. New York: Farrar & Rinehart. 1939. $3.*

Reviewed by CHARLES W. FERGUSON

THIS is a damn good book. There are a lot of other hifalutin things you could say about it, but none would quite express the way you feel after you finish it. Utterly without literary varnish, the book prompts terse, plainspoken comment. You are talking consciously or unconsciously like the hero when you are through, and a little roughshod language isn't out of character.

E. C. Abbott died at the age of sixty-eight a few days before the book of his memories was published. With a few well-chosen words in the introduction, Helena Huntington Smith explains how she happened to become the amanuensis of this ripsnortin' old cowhand, details some of the tribulations she had in keeping pace with his narrative, and then steps gracefully aside. From there on it's Abbott's story. But while Miss Smith deserves an award for not seeking to refine Abbott's account and has otherwise discharged her duties enviably, you have the feeling that Abbott would have come out on top, no matter what form the book assumed. He is all there, and a yard wide—lovable, real, open, talkative, but with enough reflective powers to give his story point.

For fifty-five exciting years Abbott lived the life of a cowman in the West, ranging all the way from Texas to Montana. An Englishman born, he came to symbolize the uncorrupted America of the open spaces, where men were men and oysters came in cans. His exploits were known throughout the region he touched, and he took on a kind of mythical significance, because he had mixed in everything that had anything to do with cattle and their consorts. They called him Teddy Blue, a nickname that gradually replaced his real name because it was acquired during one of his innumerable experiences with the sporting women of his day. Abbott was a cut-up in his youth, and if some of his pranks (such as riding his horse into the parlor of what he calls a "house," with no comment on the nature of its fame) seem a trifle on the dubious side now, at least he tells about them well and lets you know what was considered fun when the West began.

It is, in fact, this revelation of how the West seemed to the men who lived it that is to me the most striking feature of his story. Most books on the West heretofore have been done by pencil-pushers of one sort or another—pageant-makers, script writers, goggle-eyed historians, or wandering scribes. Among them, one and all, there has been the tendency to look upon the West and its characters as either oddities or copy. The result is that our generation has at best a daguerreotype impression.

Abbott's book and others that are sure to follow will go a long way to correct that. Read any of his extensive reminiscences of the ladies of pleasure and the chivalrous regard of the cowhands for them; or read the story of the cowboy who died in Abbott's arms in a ratty hotel above a saloon, or study Abbott's incessant determination to prove his courage; better still, absorb his yarn as a whole and you'll understand a lot more about the flesh-and-blood West than you did before.

It is true that the book suffers somewhat from being too authentic. There are times when a legitimate dramatization of incident might have made for better reading. Some passages seem to be handled too hurriedly or casually—in a way better suited to spoken than to written narrative. But perhaps this is to quibble. What the book lacks in detail it makes up in total effect.

*Charles W. Ferguson, associate editor of* The Reader's Digest, *is a native of Amarillo, Texas. He is the author of "Fifty Million Brothers" and "The Confusion of Tongues."*

"For fifty-five exciting years Abbott lived the life of a cowman in the West, ranging all the way from Texas to Montana" . . . (Drawing by Ross Santee from "We Pointed Them North.")

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The Saturday Review
of Literature

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## You Have a Book

HARVARD had—or, more accurately, was—a library three hundred years ago, but the first tax-supported public library in the United States was not established until two centuries later. The date was 1833 and the place, not inappropriately, Peterboro, New Hampshire.

America's 17,000 libraries of our time—public, semi-public, and institutional—shelter some 160,000,000 books, and that is a noble number until one reflects that there are, after all, 130,000,000 of us. Each of us has a book—yea, a book and a quarter, and there are many pathetic little collections that could supply any of us with his essential fraction. But just as in the annual report of his railroad a single modest commuter burgeons into an imposing total of six hundred passengers, so do many millions of these volumes swell each into a dozen, a score, fifty. Certain others, of course, do not on this cumulative basis so much as rise to the stature of units. Lawrence C. Wroth of the John Carter Brown Library has said that a book merits inclusion in a specialized collection if it is consulted once in a hundred years. And so it does. There is room, and use, in American libraries alike for Anne Bradstreet and for Emily Post.

Librarians, indeed, go Janus one better. They must look not two but three ways at once. Their lively concern for the shape of things to come is admirably exemplified in a sheaf of papers which has just been assembled with the imprints of the American Library Association to which twenty men and women, most of them specialists in one phase or another of library technique, have contributed.* Several of the papers take a deliberate stance thirty years hence and survey the intervening generation in perspective (and would we all might). This innocent stratagem, one surmises, gives the authors an opportunity to express themselves with rather more forthrightness than if they were writing in strict and literal contemporaneity.

But all the contributors are good sports. They know, no one better, that they are living in an era of devil take the hindmost, and that oftener than not the hindmost is the library. Yet there is little complaint regarding sawed-off budgets and strangulated appropriations. Budgets and appropriations, they doubtless assume, can be taken for ungranted.

The problem is at least adumbrated though not largely stressed in a paper entitled "The Trustee and the Future." This paper—one is tempted to remark inevitably—is itself the handiwork of a library trustee—William E. Marcus of Montclair, New Jersey. Obviously Mr. Marcus is not the sort of trustee who keeps the competent librarian in perduring fantods. "Apparently," he writes, "more public libraries are handicapped by unqualified trustees than by ineffective librarians. A study of the most successful libraries in America reveals the fact that their leadership is the result of forward-looking, alert, intelligent trustees, associated with a librarian competent to administer the internal affairs of the library."

Heaven is not reached at a single bound, and the day when the qualified trustee can be universally assumed rather than sporadically hoped for will doubtless not dawn on the proximate morrow. It is true that many communities are blessed with library trustees who are something more than stuffed shirts, and that certain particularly favored municipalities know the benison of trustees who not only own but occasionally open stuffed wallets. The ideal trustee, of course, can and should do more than take a full hand out of his pocket. The highest service he can render his library is to declare its prestige to the community. Or, as Mr. Marcus says: "If trustees all over the country would only realize that larger library budgets are their responsibility and not that of librarians, and if they would use sound, practical sales methods, there would be many more libraries rendering adequate service and justifying larger appropriations."

The fact that "all too often the librarian is looked upon as an administrative officer" is stressed by President Henry M. Wriston of Brown University. The college librarian, as Dr. Wriston points out, should be "in the most genuine sense an officer of instruction." The fallacy of regarding the librarian purely as an administrative officer is sometimes held off the campus as well as on it. It has occasionally touched depths of mild absurdity in the instance of large and highly specialized collections. The technically equipped specialist should not be compelled to double in books and bookkeeping. The solution may be a duplex hegemony, with the administrative officer ranking with (and not, as naval jargon has it, "with but after") the librarian. A parallel that is at least partly apt is the present-day tendency to engage as hospital administrators specially trained executives who are not themselves physicians.

Most sharply focussed (because most sharply focussable) of the papers is Herbert Putnam's prognosis of the Library of Congress. The dream of the new annex is about to come true, providing space for 15,000,000 volumes and giving the Library of Congress a capacity double that of any other existing library except the new repository in Moscow, which will about match Washington.

Without indicating that the contingency is at all likely, Mr. Putnam senses a putative "major peril" in the possibility that, "the other personnel employed by Congress being subjects of patronage, there may develop a disposition to reduce to the same category the personnel of the Library, whose selection, appointment, promotion, or dismissal have for the past forty years been within the exclusive authority of the Librarians. Such a disposition might not take the form of a specific proposal, but vaguely influencing individual members, may cause demands embarrassing to the administration."

It is Mr. Putnam's hope that if in the future "the pressure should become excessive," such outside support as would be essential in resisting it "should come particularly from the American Library Association." Should such a crusade become necessary, every literate American as well should help to push back the lines before they can move forward in organized offensive. Members of Congress no less than Hollywood stars and radio celebrities are acutely sensitive to the size and nature of the morning mail.

JOHN T. WINTERICH.

* *THE LIBRARY OF TOMORROW. A Symposium. Edited by Emily Miller Danton. Chicago: American Library Association.* 1939. $2.50.

## Indian Rope Trick

By LLOYD FRANKENBERG

BEYOND the farthest reach of sea
The ship suspends in dreamy motion
Swimming in heaven clear and free
Upon a severed ocean.

Her grey smoke fabulous and far,
The white foam flecking side and prow
Are fainter than faint moonbeams are.
She moves in her own here and now

Across the blue and gullworn track
Of this too real and solid air;
Ghostly by day her spar and stack
And wheelhouse there.

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# Letters to the Editor: *Survival of Knowledge; "Seeing New Englandly"*

### Sack of Byzantium

SIR:—This is one of many letters you should receive from students of the Near East in protest against a statement in Jonathan Griffin's review of "Escape to Life," by Klaus and Erika Mann (April 22). Comparing the flight of leaders of culture from the sack of Byzantium with their present migration from Nazi Germany, he says:

" . . . Byzantium . . . was the only place where the knowledge of ancient Greece survived."

The reviewer would do well to read "The History of the Arabs," by Dr. Philip K. Hitti, of Princeton—where the Manns now reside—or Prof. George Sarton's "Introduction to the History of Science." While Arabo-Islamic culture lacked an appreciation of Greek literature and art, it did effectively appropriate, and at many points advance, Greek philosophy and science. It is significant, moreover, that the Arabs received their Greek heritage mainly through Christian and pagan Syriac translations! Byzantine scholars, with their Greek manuscripts, became a factor in the West only after centuries of Arabo-Greek influence there through the main intermediary channels of Moorish Spain and Arabo-Norman Sicily.

All your readers interested in Palestine will thank you for Dr. David H. Popper's review, in the same issue, of T. R. Feiwel's "No Ease in Zion." It should be most useful at a time when intelligent Zionist audiences have shown displeasure over the eminently fair discussions of the Palestine problem by Sir Ronald Storrs.

CHARLES D. MATTHEWS,
*Director of the Library.*
Birmingham-Southern College
Birmingham, Alabama.

### 'Twas Brillig

SIR:—Do I *know* the Brills? Can one hope to know them outside of "Wickford Point"?

However, like Emily Dickinson, "I see New Englandly" and send the enclosed quatrain à propos of that.

NEW ENGLANDLY

We boast of old New England and her glorious granite hills,
We see oursel's and preen ourselves that we aren't like the Brills
And yet between New Englanders there is a certain bond—
Each one of us would like to be as brilliant as Marquand.

ELEANOR DWIGHT.
Bronxville, N. Y.

### More Sockalexes

SIR:—Sockalexis is the name of a well known family of Penobscot Indians. "Old Sockalexis" was winning canoe races in the eighties, and I think it was the same man who was famous in professional baseball. Another Sockalexis was a distance runner some years later. I imagine you'll still find some of the name on the old estate, which includes Moosehead Lake, Katahdin, and the West Branch.

JOHN RICHARDS.
Saint Paul's School
Concord, N. H.

*Other identifiers of Sockalexis: T. A. Daly, Germantown, Pa.; Henry Hood, Madison, Wis.; G. A. B., Madison, Wis.*

"Do you actually mean to say 'The Jabberwocky' makes no more sense than 'The Flat Foot Floogee with the Floy-Floy'?"

### South Carolina Gentleman

SIR:—Is the anonymous author of "South Carolina Gentleman," a Northern contribution to the poetry of invective and abuse produced by the Civil War, to be properly regarded as the *Ur*-Ogden Nash, by virtue of line 4 in each of its six stanzas? The first and last, which are typical, follow (Air—"The Fine Old English Gentleman"):

Down in a small Palmetto State the curious ones may find,
A ripping, tearing gentleman, of an uncommon kind,
A staggering, swaggering sort of chap, who takes his whiskey straight,
And frequently condemns his eyes to that ultimate vengeance which a clergyman of high standing has assured must be a sinner's fate:
This South Carolina gentleman, one of the present time. . . .

Of course he's all the time in debt to those who credit give,
Yet manages upon the best the market yields to live;
But if a Northern creditor asks him his bill to heed,
This honorable gentleman instantly draws two bowie-knives and a pistol, dons a blue cockade, and declares that in consequence of the repeated aggressions of the North, and its gross violations of the Constitution, he feels that it would utterly degrade him to pay any debt whatever, and that in fact he has at last determined to SECEDE:
This South Carolina gentleman, one of the present time.

(White, Richard Grant, *Poetry . . . of the Civil War*, American News Co., N. Y., 1866, pp. 17-18)

KENNETH PORTER.
Vassar College
Poughkeepsie, N. Y.

### Paul Lemperly

SIR:—I know the *Review* is grieved as we are by the death of a distinguished collector of association books, Mr. Paul Lemperly, of this city.

I believe that Mr. Lemperly's outstanding quality was in the fact that he was not a "check-book" collector. He bought and really *read* the work of authors he admired and collected, and he wrote them letters of his appreciation which in turn brought him deep friendships from all over the English speaking world. Hardy, Kipling, and Conrad were his most frequent correspondents. He read and collected and praised their work in their early days, long before their work was accepted by the critics and book-lovers. Mr. Lemperly's critically discerning, keen, and penetrating judgment of the "moderns" has always been an inspiration to those of us who have more recently become bibliomaniacs. We will miss deeply the privilege of sitting with him among his books.

PORTER S. WELCH.
The Burrows Brothers Co.
Cleveland, Ohio.

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# The Big Book

BY JO HUBBARD CHAMBERLIN

Readers of *The Saturday Review* will remember a review of the Sears Roebuck catalogue which we printed two years ago. The present article, written from an entirely different approach, is a factual account of the development of "the big book" from its beginning in 1891.

TWO seasons ago, when the stage designer for the Broadway production of Edith Wharton's "Ethan Frome" wanted some authentic information on how Americans dressed in 1910, he turned to the Sears Roebuck catalogue of that year. Movie producers constantly refer to old catalogues for costumes and properties. Twentieth Century-Fox found them invaluable in the preparation of the recent film "Jesse James." Paramount has quite a few volumes, and used them in "Men with Wings." And Walt Disney has the most complete collection of old catalogues on the Coast, loaning them to other studios, and consulting them frequently for bygone fashions and furnishings.

Despite the enormous number of Sears catalogues distributed through the years, complete sets are rare and valuable. For the "big book," as it is often called by children, has earned in the half century of its existence the status of an expert historian, chronicling without bias or emotion the many changes that have taken place in American life. Not only does it show you that a style was popular during certain years, but the space devoted to it shows exactly *how* popular it was, for space has always been allotted on the basis of sales.

How many of these catalogue items of the gay '90's do you remember? Bosom boards, celluloid collars, flageolets, mourning handkerchiefs, Prince Albert suits, stereoscopes, and goat sulkies for the children? Practically all of the real old-timers are gone—the crocodile sofa and the fur derby hat, the buffalo robe and the solid gold toothpick with earspoon combined. Do you remember the ornate mustache cup? "An appropriate gift for the man of elegance," the catalogue says—and so it was. But it disappeared forever in 1911. If you are over forty, you may have once held hands with your best girl in a "cozy-corner"—that short, stiffly upholstered sofa in a corner of the parlor. That is gone now, as are also the umbrella stands, the hall hatracks, the golden oak dining-room sideboards, and the leather Turkish rockers of our youth. Gone too are the bombardo boards which amused young people at the turn of the century, along with the zither and the dulcimer.

Pajamas were first carried, for men only, in 1899 and were described as "just the thing for traveling, as they admit of greater freedom than the usual kind of nightshirt." Evidently there was little sale of these newfangled garments, for they appeared in the book only irregularly until 1908, when they came to stay.

The frontier period in American life lasted longer than most people think—the last white duck covered wagon did not vanish from the catalogue until 1924. Buggies occupied 22 pages in 1896 and none by 1933. Twin beds appeared in 1921, chastely finished in white enamel. "Radio apparatus" was first mentioned in 1919 under "telegraph instruments," with a modest four inches of space; now it spreads haughtily over 20 pages.

Even in our more sophisticated circles there are few people who cannot look back nostalgically to some time in their lives when, through the catalogue's impetus, they sent in hard-earned money to buy a winter dress, a first pair of long pants, or a .22 rifle. Indeed, the catalogue rounds out the entire life cycle, beginning with a Baby's Layette ("a lovely gift for any mother-to-be at $7.49") and ending with an Old Folks Bible ("printed in large clear type at $1.98"). Which may explain the hold the big book has on people today, the kind of hold that high-powered public relations counsels are always dreaming about—and trying to build in a day.

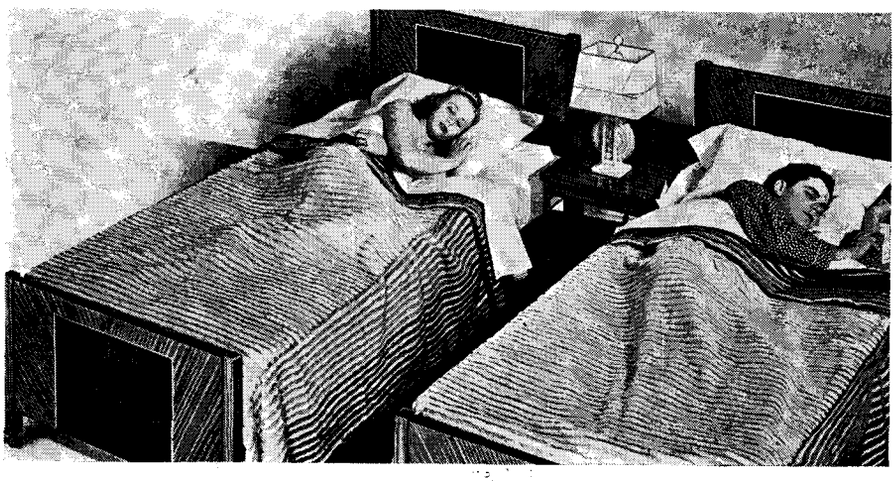
Just about any way you look at it, the catalogue is the biggest book in the world. It is read by more people than any book published, except perhaps the Bible—some 7,000,000 copies are dumped on the nation's doorsteps *twice* a year. At one time Sears paid one-fiftieth of the country's entire postage bill. And although this hefty four pounds of reading matter costs a dollar to produce and is distributed free, it is the lowest-cost merchandising system yet developed—for it sells $250,000,000 worth of goods every year, sight unseen.

It takes an army of several thousand people to produce and distribute it. In the advertising division alone are eighty merchandising men, twenty advertising executives, two hundred and forty copywriters, six hundred artists, photographers, and layout men—a staff as large as any Manhattan agency. Plus thousands of engravers, compositors, linotypers, pressmen, binders, people to get the books through the mail or put them on the country's doorsteps.

And because climate and human nature vary, the catalogues distributed from ten key cities differ. The Atlanta catalogue, for instance, has 964 pages; the Chicago book or key book, 1,218. In the Southern books, fur coats, ice skates, sleds, ski suits, and the like are left out. Different types of stoves are featured because heating is less of a problem, and because more wood is burned than in the North. Mattresses are frequently built firmer because they are cooler in the summer. And because of differences in soil, the farm machinery offered to one section of the country differs radically from that offered to another.

The big book must remember, too, that Southern people as a rule prefer brighter colors than Northern. That Southern women buy frillier underthings. That the East prefers Colonial furniture; the Middle West goes in for period designs; the South prefers the ornate or flashy types; while the Far West buys the most modern furniture. And in the North, South, East, or West the style factor is just as important in horse goods and harness as it is in women's hats!

The big book was born in a humble railway freight office in North Redwood, Minnesota, where Richard Sears was the young station agent in the late eighties. To cover the freight charges on a stranded shipment of watches, Sears had sold the watches to other railroad men. Finding a ready market, he began selling watches by mail, writing his letters in longhand. One of his schemes was to send



"Pajamas were first carried, for men only, in 1899. . . . Twin beds appeared in 1921" . . . . (Illustration from the Sears Roebuck catalogue.)

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a few watches by express to some imaginary person in another town. When the station agent would notify him that they had not been called for, he would ask the agent to sell the watches and keep a couple of dollars profit on each one for himself—which he usually did.

Sears had stumbled on a billion-dollar idea.

The first catalogue, selling only watches, was a thirty-two-page booklet, three by six inches in size, published in 1891. By 1893 Sears had been joined by Alvah Curtis Roebuck, and they came out with a six-by-nine-inch book, adding other goods to the line. Business boomed and the catalogues increased in size until the present book was established in 1896. To supplement the catalogue, retail stores were first opened in 1925, and although they now account for a larger volume of sales than the big book, they have not changed the Sears catalogue's share of the national farm income—two percent. This remains constant, good years and bad.

The early days of mail order were harebrained and hazardous, and Sears wasn't too fussy about the accuracy of the flamboyant ads he wrote. Once he described a special quality man's suit in great detail, at a special price—without first bothering to buy the suits. The orders flocked in, and Sears, frantically rummaging through Chicago, dumfounded the proprietor of a small West Side clothing factory by buying out his entire stock. The proprietor was Julius Rosenwald.

Rosenwald began furnishing clothing to the new company, eventually gaining an interest, and finally, control. Roebuck sold out to follow other interests in 1895. (He returned to the company in 1936 to fill a minor post after losing his money in Florida real estate.) Sears retired in 1908 and died in 1914.

Rosenwald recognized Sears's selling and writing ability, but he felt that exaggerated claims and rosy promises struck most people as silly—the space could be better used in describing the goods for sale. His notion was contrary to existing practice, but he gradually put it into effect and proved his point with a book which now sells a quarter of a billion dollars' worth of goods every year. Nowhere in its pages will you read that any one of the 50,000 items offered will avoid housewife's knuckles, hold a straying mate, wangle a date for the junior prom, or make one the life of the party.

Since most of the catalogue's customers live on farms or in small communities, it is for them the big book is planned. The catalogue frankly recognizes the fact that women who milk cows, keep house, and bear children often have plump figures quite unlike the beanpoles of fashion. The farmer is never shown as a rube; he looks alert, cheerful, progressive. The models do not smoke cigarettes because women once complained that it encouraged youngsters to do the same. Only one cocktail set is listed and that is purposely obscure. However, the catalogue does list those handy-men of the devil—playing cards, dice, and poker chips.

Because profits of a mail order business are eaten up by returned goods, there is an intense effort to find *le mot juste*, to make the copy clear and the pictures revealing, to anticipate the customer's queries and answer any objections he might raise. Sears has a special school for its copywriters, where they learn that the determining factor in word selection is the vocabulary of the reader, not the writer. They are expected to be paragons of accuracy in their descriptions of goods, too. Raincoats must not be described as "rainproof" unless the seams as well as the fabric are rainproof as tested by the laboratory.

The big book also performs extra services. Each year 150,000 trappers send in furs which Sears markets without cost, giving the customers the choice of cash or merchandise in return. A special catalogue, "Tips to Trappers," tells them when to set their traps, and what is the best time of year for skinning skunks. Some sixty special catalogues and bargain bulletins are issued, usually listing items at ten percent under the regular catalogue prices, to clear the shelves for new stock.

"Live Happily Ever After!" (From the Sears Roebuck catalogue.)

Bibles have always sold well and are conspicuously displayed today on two facing pages varying in price from "The Christian Worker's Bible" at $4.98 to the "small size pocket Bible" at twenty-one cents. Only one other book has ever received such a display—Lew Wallace's "Ben Hur." In a burst of enthusiasm the company bought one million copies and had to use drastic measures to get rid of them.

To appeal to the high school freshman, there is one clothing item which remains year after year: fancy suits with "22-inch trouser cuffs," and "two-tone belted reversible vests." They are described in 1939 as "modern, youthful, full of zip and class" at $15.85.

And it isn't just for sentiment's sake that the catalogue still carries such old-line goods as lightning rods, piano rolls, women's fleece-lined bloomers, men's nightgowns, and Congress gaiters. They've sold in volume for years, or out they'd come.

While the big book never sees its customers, it is possible to get a good many ideas about them from the letters which accompany orders. Before going to a staff of correspondents, however, the incoming mail is weighed; the company knows how many dollars' worth of business can be expected in each one hundred pounds of mail.

Correspondents answer each letter in the same spirit in which it is written: humorous, dignified, philosophical, or neighborly. Puzzled people in all walks of life write in for babies' names, directions for raising children, how to tan pelts, preserve peaches, erect a hoghouse, or adjust the neckline of an evening dress. They write to an old friend whose personality has been built up through a half century.

A worried father once wrote that his daughter had run away with a "no-good trifling loafer" who would surely send in a mail order some time, and when he did, would the company forward his address? The company wrote that it couldn't, but a correspondent out of curiosity made a casual note of the young husband's name. Three months later in came an order from a city far from father's wrath, for a woman's suit, three pairs of silk stockings and a machinist's toolbox. At least he wasn't a loafer.

A woman, broken-hearted over her husband's suspected infidelities, asked if he had ordered the new dress she had seen her rival wearing. Many a lonely farm boy has asked Sears to find him a wife, apparently under the impression that the models used in the photographs probably could be "talked to" in such a worthy cause. This is not as comical as it sounds, because many of the big book's models *have* gone on to Hollywood: Norma Shearer, Jean Arthur, Gloria Swanson, Neil Hamilton, Fredric March, and others.

A philosophical gentleman with a hangover but no regrets wrote: "Yesterday when I was drunk I sent you a check for $2.50 but forgot to tell you what I wanted: two folding chairs at $1.10 apiece with thirty cents for express. Don't blame me. The liquor was the best I could get around here, moonshine at $1.25 a gallon, and you can't expect too much from that."

A South Dakota farm woman wanted to know: "Which sounds best for children to call parents—Father, Mother, Papa, Mama, or Daddy? My girl writes with her left hand. Would you train her to write with her right hand? What are physics? What is rhythm?"

Undoubtedly countless youngsters have learned to read from the big book. In one section of Wyoming the sheep herders used to make it their exclusive reading all winter long. In the spring they could quote you the exact price on anything in the catalogue—known locally as the "Wind River Bible."

Such is the testament of that portion

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of our population which we have come to consider as distinctly American. The catalogue reflects their conservatism, their unwillingness to pay out hard-earned money for that which does not serve some useful purpose, their quickness to resent their being taken advantage of, and their ready appreciation of help when given.

It is this kind of people the catalogue reaches, and their ways of living and thinking are indelibly imprinted on its engaging pages—pored over in several million homes by moist-fingered children, gingham-aproned housewives, and elderly people whose eyes are not as good as they used to be, and for whom we respectfully recommend the "Old Folks Bible, printed in large clear type at $1.98."

## Black Thunder

*DRUMS AT DUSK. By Arna Bontemps. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1939. $2.50.*

Reviewed by C. D. Abbott

THE Negro insurrection in colonial Santo Domingo was a significant accompaniment to the French Revolution. The Creole planters had succumbed to a luxury that was peculiarly effete. Regarding their paradise as too far distant from the horrors of Paris to be seriously affected, they basked in their self-importance, while the slaves, who vastly outnumbered them, grew intoxicated upon liberty, equality, and fraternity. Suddenly the storm broke, and its violence made even the atrocities of the Terror seem mild.

Mr. Bontemps is an American Negro who has seen in that Haitian cataclysm a story that is vitally pertinent to the history of his race, and he has developed it into a novel which is a signal contribution to Negro literature. He is not without an understanding sympathy for the more far-sighted of the island aristocrats, whose characters he develops almost with tenderness, but among the planters they were an impotent minority lost in the crowd of selfish, grasping men whose tyranny knew no limits. These he pursues with relentless and very effective irony. It is, however, with the blacks themselves that he is most dramatically successful. He has been able to present them as a vast, undifferentiated mass, a seething horde of misused animals who at last can bear no more and who rise more like a flood than an army. And then out of the mass comes the exceptional figure, the Toussaint, the hero who can, perhaps, direct the whirlwind. It is a gripping story from start to finish because its matter is vital and important. Even its many faults, of which a spasmodically fumbling style and a stern insistence upon visceral shudders are the worst, cannot obscure its passionate honesty.

## The Caliban of Reconstruction

*THADDEUS STEVENS, THE SINISTER PATRIOT. By Alphonse B. Miller. New York: Harper & Bros. 1939. $4.*

Reviewed by George Fort Milton

ONE strange thing about war is that the great leaders of the battlefield eventually become imbued with the zeal for peace; while the politicians in the legislative halls miles from the front become more and more consumed with the corrosive hates.

Certainly such was the case in Washington during the Civil War and Reconstruction. The gentleness with which Grant received Lee's surrender, the commiserative spirit with which Sherman met Joe Johnston, were conspicuous by their absence from the leadership of the Congress that had the opportunity to

"Old Thad Stevens—a lusty hater, a champion of invective; a man with naught but contempt for his foes" . . .

make peace a blessing but instead made it a curse.

At the head of the Congressional battalion of death was Old Thad Stevens—a lusty hater, a champion of invective, a man with naught but bitterness and contempt for his foes. It is of this man, the Caliban of Reconstruction, that Alphonse B. Miller has written his book. To the adjective of his sub-title—the sinister patriot—none could make objection, although many may doubt the noun.

And yet one thing must be said about Thad Stevens. For all his clubfoot and his twisted heart, and his mind full of malice and his tongue full of venom, he was the greatest parliamentary leader the United States has ever known.

Once I was talking with Senator Borah about the great parliamentary leaders of remembered history: William Pitt, Charles James Fox, Gladstone, Disraeli, Parnell, the French Revolutionary triad of Robespierre, Danton, and Marat. Among Americans, Fisher Ames was mentioned, John Randolph of Roanoke, Daniel Webster, and Henry Clay. But we were agreed that, so far as the ability of a legislative leader to coerce an unwilling group of men into obedience to his will was involved, Thad Stevens was probably the greatest of them all.

The author recognizes this fact and makes the most of it. This reviewer is in disagreement with many of his attitudes toward Reconstruction. He almost adopts Stevens's tone toward Andrew Johnson, whose chief sin as President was that he believed in making peace something other than a curse for the prostrate South. But be this as it may, the book is well written, its style has movement, pungency, and occasionally delightful satire. Furthermore, Mr. Miller does not insist upon making Old Thad anything other than what he was. He paints him as of the earth more than earthy. And he stands out as an extraordinary man.

Thad Stevens's career was strangely disproportioned. Born in 1792, he was in his late fifties before he came upon the national stage. He first sat in the House which passed the Compromise of 1850; he last sat in the House which prosecuted the impeachment of the President of the United States. Until the war broke out, his House service was active, bitter, not particularly controlling. By the time of Antietam, however, Stevens was forging his way to the control of the House.

So it was that he worked with Henry Winter Davis in opposition to Lincoln's Reconstruction policies. And when Johnson, the Plebeian patriot from Tennessee, took Lincoln's place, and soon began to want to follow Lincoln's policies of restoration, Old Thad was immediately at war. No sooner had Congress opened in December, 1865, than Stevens spiked the Johnsonian gun. And from then until impeachment's failure there was hardly a legislative day in which this grim old warrior did not denounce "the traitor in the White House." In fact, I think he died not from disease, although he was sore afflicted. I think he died from a broken heart because impeachment failed.

My own sympathies are with the group of Moderates who, if they had won, could have saved the South and the nation many years of needless sectional bitterness. And yet I prefer Thad Stevens to the egregiously God-like Summer, or the leering Ben Butler, buffoon as well as "Beast," or the sanctimonious John Sherman, or any other of the weirdly motted Radical tribe. For there was no cant about Old Thad—he did not pretend, he did not pose, he did not lie. Loving seldom, lusting often, he made no bones about it. Gambling with a passion, he proclaimed it. Property—except in slaves—was his god, and he boasted of it. For all his sins, he knew how to command his fellows. And he had a number one mind.

*George Fort Milton, editor of the* Chattanooga News, *is the author of "The Age of Hate."*

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# Romantic Record of Empire

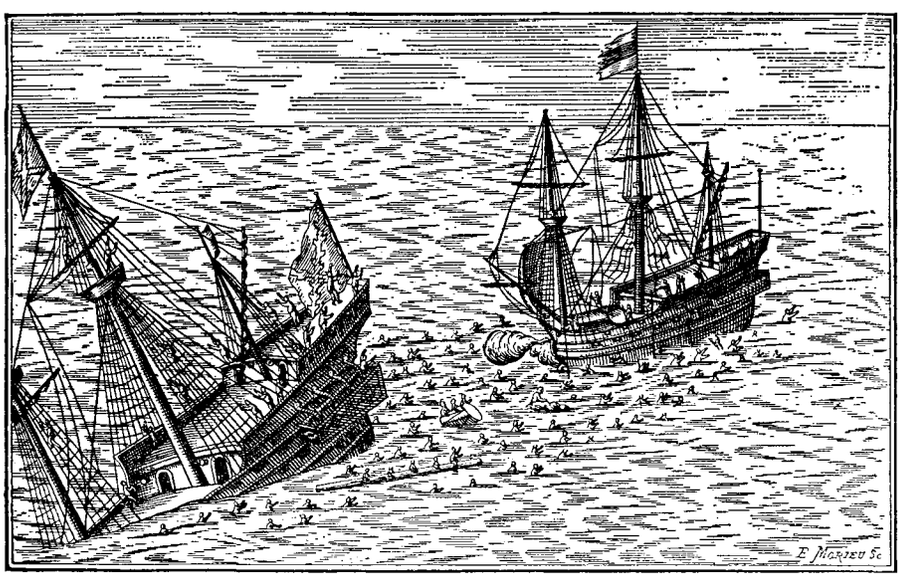
*THE MANILA GALLEON. By William Lytle Schurz. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.* 1939. $6.

Reviewed by GARRETT MATTINGLY

FOR two hundred and fifty years from 1565 to 1815 there came annually into the deep landlocked harbor of Acapulco, two hundred miles by winding mountain roads from Mexico City, one or more high-sided Spanish galleons from across the lonely Pacific. They came laden with the goods of the Orient, especially the silks of China, and returned freighted with those *pesos* of Mexican silver which rapidly became the standard currency of the farther East. The whole trading community of Manila lived by the profits of this annual voyage, and the Spanish dominions in the Philippines were bound to the great empire of Spain solely by this one slender thread. No other regular navigation, surely, was ever so full of perils, yet no other line of ships known to history lasted so long. The story of the Manila galleons must be among the strangest and most romantic of the records of empire.

In this book it is competently told. A historical introduction provides enough general history of the Philippines to keep the reader straight, and then follow topical chapters, each on a chronological framework and with surprisingly little repetition, describing the trade in the Orient with China and Japan, India and the Spice Isles, the dangerous navigation itself and the ships and men that made it, the competitors who menaced it, and the destination of the wares. The list of these last reads like a manifest of Sinbad's show, and their carriage entailed fighting and hairbreadth adventure enough to supply a whole school of historical novelists; but though rich in these, this book does not neglect soberer details. How the trade was regulated, how the ships were built and manned, most of the questions we would ask are answered as fully and precisely as the materials permit. Besides utilizing an immense amount of printed matter, Mr. Schurz has dug into the *Archivo de Indias* at Seville for fresh and welcome information, and written a book not only for the general reader but for the student of economic history also.

That being so, it is a pity that the student gets so little help towards using it. This book deserves to reach the general reader for whom it is designed—I hope it reaches him in thousands—but is he really so skittish as to be hopelessly repelled by a few footnotes? Eight pages are filled with a list of documents examined; such lists, without some indication of what new material the documents offer, are of no use to anybody except as evidence of the author's industry. The bibliography heaps together more than three hundred publications, some of them in scores of volumes, without distinguishing those which have provided a quaint phrase or served to verify a single fact, from those which have yielded the substance of a dozen pages; without discriminating between the indispensable and the relatively worthless, or offering a word of criticism as to which books should be consulted for which topics. In other words the only way to check Mr. Schurz's interpretations or his fresh contributions is to do his work all over again. This book is the result of considerable scholarship; it's too bad that a prejudice about the limitations of the popular reader should have denied it its proofs. It's about time that American authors and publishers combined to persuade the general reader to take the necessary scholarly apparatus without gagging. He may not be so squeamish as they think.



Engagement between a Spanish Galleon and a Dutch ship.

Dr. S. Josephine Baker

# Campaigner for Child Health

*FIGHTING FOR LIFE. By S. Josephine Baker, M.D. New York: The Macmillan Company.* 1939. $2.75.

Reviewed by MABEL S. ULRICH, M.D.

DR. JOSEPHINE BAKER, as everyone knows—or should—was the first person to inject the health of children into practical politics. Under her directorship the Bureau of Child Hygiene—the first in the world—was established in New York City in 1909. For thirty years through changing administrations, she concentrated all her energies on organizing and extending New York's child-saving campaign, impartially loyal to Tammany or "reform" mayors and commissioners, asking only that they aid and abet her work. She retired only when every state in the Union had a child bureau of its own, modeled after her set-up, and when the appalling number of infant deaths had been reduced two-thirds. Her autobiography is largely the story of those thirty years. It is the bracing tale of how one woman, armed chiefly with common-sense and courage, conducted and won a fight against great odds, and emerged without a trace of rancor or intolerance, and with her sense of humor intact.

Dr. Baker went into medicine with none of the "fancy" and sentimental ideas so rampant among career women in the 90's. Born into a happy, well-to-do family in Poughkeepsie, she had seventeen gay, carefree years before she was suddenly confronted with the necessity of earning a living. Her description of those girlhood years will awaken many a nostalgic pang in readers of her "age group." After her graduation from the now extinct Woman's Medical College, under teachers who will always be revered by women physicians, she interned in Boston, and then hung out her shingle in New York. Her first year brought her exactly $185. Economic determinism was responsible for starting her on her career. She passed the Civil Service examinations, and became a

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school inspector at the munificent salary of a dollar a day. During the summer she "inspected" tenements for the health department in New York's infamous Hell's Kitchen, and so outraged was she by the sights and experiences that she was forced to confront every day, that her life was then and there committed to the fight against social injustice and the slipshod methods of municipal health work.

With the establishment of the child hygiene bureau the fight was more than half won, but there still remained much opposition to be overcome, opposition from politicians, mothers, and the medical profession that broke out with every proposed extension of the work. Nevertheless it had been demonstrated pretty thoroughly that common sense and relatively little money had saved thousands of lives, and could arrest to a surprising degree the spread of contagious diseases among school children. Soon distinguished visitors from all over the world began to come to New York to study that city's organization for child health.

"Fighting for Life" is crowded with incidents, tragic and funny, wise comments, medical information, names and pen pictures of many notables; it takes in the suffrage campaign and includes a lively account of a trip to Russia. It has all the breeziness of a pioneer tale, but its chief value lies in the fact that it is the undecorated, straightforward account of how a tremendous job was done by a woman who saw it in these terms: "Here was a great waste: my problem was how to prevent it."

## I Look at American Fiction

(*Continued from page* 4)

I believe, used it in all his novels from "Manhattan Transfer" to "The Big Money," gradually modifying it in certain interesting directions; Elmer Rice in "Imperial City" also uses it in a modified form. John Steinbeck wrote "Of Mice and Men" almost entirely in scene. Indeed I don't think I should be exaggerating if I called this maximum-scene technique one of the striking characteristics of modern American fiction. And I think it is so because it expresses a certain striking characteristic of American life.

The American is a much more conscious person than the average Englishman. At any given moment he is wide-awake, alert, all there; he knows just what he is and what he means and where he is going, and can give you that information accurately and articulately, in a rapid flow of trisyllabic words. The Englishman at any given moment is much less conscious; his ideas are much less clearly defined than the American's, and he simply loathes finding words for them. But the Englishman has a stronger unconscious memory than the American; once a fact has (at last) penetrated his brain, it inexorably sticks there, and in time helps to form what I might perhaps call a racial memory, which he shares with all other Englishmen. As a visiting stranger, I am immensely struck by what appears to me the shortness of the American memory. Take as illustration one tiny detail: spectacles. In the 1920's America set the world the example of wearing horn-rimmed spectacles. England found them comfortable, began presently to wear them, and is still wearing them today. But in America, not only have horn-rimmed spectacles ceased to be the fashion, it has been forgotten that they ever were the fashion; my own horn-rimmed spectacles were actually called "English" by a Middle-Western reporter last month. Slang, too, which crossed the Atlantic a few years ago in an easterly direction, has now been totally forgotten in the country of its origin. Now there are advantages and disadvantages in both these types of minds. In a crisis, the American is quick, the Englishman slow; but the Englishman has more, and more lasting, tradition on which to call in danger than the American. The American forgets, which is a pity; but the Englishman, remembering, nags, which is a pity too! I could multiply illustrations of this interesting difference, but it is not in itself my point; my point is that the technique of the actual-present-now, the maximum-scene, is brilliantly suited to record American life, which is lived so much more completely in the actual-present-now than is the English. The fabric of English life is very closely woven; the main threads of the past still guide the pattern today. American life seems to me, on the contrary, to be composed, like press pictures sent by wireless, of a multitude of highly significant dots—separate and distinct dots, separate nows.

What are the merits and defects of contemporary American fiction, as seen through an English writer's eyes? I am going to take the defects first, with the remark that I could, of course, find just as many defects, and just as irritating defects, in contemporary English fiction, only that chances not now to be my theme.

The first defect which strikes the English eye is an excess of sentimentality—often to be found just where we particularly resent it, namely in fiction supposed to be "tough." I offer as example a novel by a novelist whom I admire, namely John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men." I admire Mr. Steinbeck's prose, his drama, his suspense, his command of emotion and climax; but gosh (or whatever is the current equivalent of gosh), *what* a sentimentalist he is! I call anyone a sentimentalist who is not prepared to take an idea to its logical conclusion. Now if you take the idea of "Of Mice and Men" to its logical conclusion, you will find that idea to be the glorification of imbecility. Plainly John Steinbeck has not taken his idea to its logical conclusion; it has stuck en route in a thick layer of sentimental treacle. Alas, a great deal of the toughest American fiction finds the same sticky end; mention a hobo (it used to be a gangster) and the author's intelligence, as well as his heart, melts to the consistency of a sob-sister. To me, people who dislike rape and murder seem better citizens than those who don't. I've no objection in the world to reading about any kind of human being whatever, and I am well capable of sympathy and understanding for any kind of human being whatever; but I do like my values kept quite clear. In this preservation of right values, the fictions of John Steinbeck, W. R. Burnett, and other such explorers of the underworld, seem not quite reliable, though in other qualities necessary to story-telling they give me pleasure.

In America, as in England, there are certain writers acclaimed by the public but condemned by the critics. In England such "popular" writers are usually characterized by a crude sentimentality, a cheap exploitation of the easier emotions. In America the case is different. J. P. Marquand has defined the fiction of such writers in his own country with admirable penetration, in his latest novel, "Wickford Point." "This escapist literature," he says, "though very seldom art, possessed a quality of artisanship which demanded high technique." In a word, it is marked by a competent slickness. This surface gloss, this sophisticated polish, is worrying to an English reader, who is sometimes led astray by it for several hours under the mistaken impression that the writer really has something to say, since he takes so much trouble to say it neatly.

And this leads me to the crowning defect of American fiction, to English eyes—or rather, English ears. All the characters talk too much. (This is true on the stage, too, alas.) In the course of my travels I was told a delicious anecdote about a certain gentleman of Kentucky, who once came home saying that he had the most charming conversation with a man on the train. The man in question was afterwards ascertained to be deaf and dumb; the Kentuckian being such a great talker himself as never to have noticed the disability of his vis-à-vis. This story may malign the Kentuckian; it is too true of too many characters in American fiction. They talk and talk; cleverly, amusingly, wise-crackingly, yes, but to the more silent English, oh how boringly! They cook too much, too; they eat too many meals. Sometimes when reading one of the honest ordinary regional novels of Iowa or Maine or the deep South, I feel that if the heroine bakes one more batch of biscuits, I shall scream.

An occasional disproportion between length of novel and quantity of material employed is a fault not confined, unfortunately, to the fiction of America, but it is a surprising fault to find in the countrymen of Abraham Lincoln, who (I am told)

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once announced that a man's legs should be long enough to reach from his body to the ground, and no longer. Similarly a novel should reach from the beginning of the story to the end, and no further. . . . But, as I say, the fault of excessive length is not confined to American, or even to English-written, novels; it is world-wide. The temptation to use a detail because a detail is there is, however, especially dangerous in America, where detail is so various and so abundant. Surrender to this temptation is apt, for example, to mar the work of that fine realist, James T. Farrell. If the story of Studs Lonigan had been half as long, the impact of his final tragedy would have been twice as stunning.

Having dealt thus flippantly with some of the things which irritate me in American fiction, let me speak seriously of what I find to admire. For I admire American fiction greatly; I read it with gusto and glee. With gusto, because it is so vigorous, so swift-moving, so various; with glee, because it is so uninhibited, so carelessly unafraid. Modern American fiction never seems to worry about being respectable; English fiction tries not to worry, but only rarely throws that worry off. In that light-hearted musical comedy, "Knickerbocker Holiday," we are instructed how to tell an American if we chance to meet one, say in Turkestan, or on a raft at sea. The conclusion reached is that

> authority repels him as a lad
> And never goes down with him.

To me, the stranger within the gates, that seems singularly true of the contemporary American novelist. Or shall I quote an American poet of longer standing, and say that to me the great merit of the American novelist of today is that he addresses all other writers as follows:

> Dead poets, philosophers, priests,
> Language-shapers on other shores . . .
> I dare not proceed till I respectfully
> credit what you have left wafted
> hither,
> I have perused it, own it is admirable
> (moving awhile among it),
> Think nothing can ever be greater,
> nothing can ever deserve more than
> it deserves,
> Regarding it all intently a long while,
> then dismissing it,
> I stand in my place with my own day
> here.

The American novelist of today does stand in his own place with his own day, does refuse to be anybody else anywhere else at any other time, and draws his strength precisely from that refusal. He lives in a great democratic nation, free to say anything he likes, with an unprecedented abundance of violently colored material close to his hand. What a future should lie before him! If that future is not achieved, it will not be the fault, I think, of the electric novelists of 1939.

*Phyllis Bentley's latest novel is "Sleep in Peace."*


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# Intimate Views of the French Revolution

*THE FRENCH REVOLUTION AS TOLD BY CONTEMPORARIES. By E. L. Higgins. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.* 1939. $3.50.

Reviewed by JOHN M. S. ALLISON

THIS book is an interesting attempt to present both the causes and a running narrative of the French Revolution through the media of memoirs and collections of documents. Such a task has required great care and infinite effort. The result is remarkably satisfactory; the picture is vivid and the continuity sustained. An even balance of interpretation and opinion is very skillfully maintained. As an example of organization of material the book is worthy of the highest commendation. It will be read with a lively interest and with benefit.

There are those, however, who will ask themselves to what use such a volume should be put, and who will have grave doubts as to its practical value. Such compilations present in reasonable compass a body of first-hand information to which access is difficult, and as purely illustrative material such collections when carefully done, as in this case, are of very real importance. The question whether they should be regarded as guides or as almost sufficient in themselves is an open one. Inevitably, the picture is not complete.

The author of this volume has been very wise in his selections, but even so there are serious lacunæ. Why, for example, is there only an intimation about the Parlements and the nature of their Remonstrances previous to 1789? This movement arose for the most part from selfish motives, it is true, but it increased rapidly in volume and attracted a great deal of public notice and discussion previous to 1789. In the section which treats of the influence of Philosophy, extracts from Walpole would have added new and very significant material to that derived from the more generally used Ségur. In the earlier sections the treatment seems a bit thin. The later sections might have been improved by the use of more documents.

These comments are in themselves evidence of the kind of doubt which will arise as to the practical value of such a book. Of necessity, the extracts must be short and, consequently, the treatment too thin. As well, an extract itself often cannot convey the full import of a document unless there is some additional comment to aid the reader. In the case of an author, such as a *philosophe*, this is particularly true.

These remarks come, however, from a doubt which is not shared in all quarters, and they are not meant to deny the understanding and skill which is displayed by the author of this book.

SOLUTION OF LAST WEEK'S DOUBLE-CROSTIC (No. 267)

MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE: OF ANGER

No one would hesitate to punish . . . a judge who condemned a criminal out of anger. Why, then, should fathers and pedagogues be any more allowed to whip and chastise children in their anger? It is no longer correction; it is vengeance.

# Village Hampdens

*THE BRITISH COMMON PEOPLE. 1746-1938. By G. H. D. Cole and Raymond Postgate. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.* 1939. $4.

Reviewed by WALLACE NOTESTEIN

THE title of this book is deceptive. We would not expect a work with so good a title to be so dull. We hope to learn about the common man, what he was doing and thinking, what myths he lived upon, what codes he accepted, and how he looked upon his equals and betters. To such questions and others we are given no answers. Rather the authors have offered thousands of details about what was done to the common man, the statutes and decisions and practices against his interest, the factory acts in his favor, etc. There are long pages about labor leaders and their quarrels with one another. If we had been told enough about them to make them characters in our memory we would not complain. We are given, however, much sound if unexciting economic history. The works of the Webbs, the Hammonds, and others have been drawn upon.

There is less generalization than might be expected. It is true that when the authors draw near to our own time, they give us more interpretation. Some of it is stimulating, and some of it is of that easy, plausible, and somewhat, hackneyed kind in which many of our friends on the left find spiritual satisfaction.

The book is of course undisguisedly partisan. It is no news that factory owners overworked and underpaid their labor and that women and children suffered terribly. We have all been brought up to believe that, but after reading this book we begin to wonder if the manufacturing classes could have been quite the villains here exhibited. The reader looks at the tables of statistics and suspects that some of them were drawn from the collections of reformers out to prove their case; he is wary of the conclusions about wages and the cost of living. Not being an economist, he is uncertain about his suspicions, but quite certain that if he wishes to be on solid ground he had best turn to the thorough and objective volumes of Clapham. Conservatives and liberals need not resent the partisanship. There will be few souls saved for the left. Only the brave—and those who have to review it—will read beyond the first eighty pages. In those pages, written no doubt by the learned and critical editor of Defoe's Tour (*i.e.*, G. H. D. Cole), we are taken over the England and London of 1746 and shown the activities and industries of the different parts of the country and of the metropolis. It is a pleasant journey by an observant man. Alas, the heavy change when he is gone.

# Right Thinking

*CULTURE. By Ezra Pound. Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions.* $2.50.

Reviewed by DUDLEY FITTS

THIS is a book to which one can say neither yes nor no. It is a compound of profundities and balderdash, pretty evenly balanced. It is a guide to right thinking, right behavior moral and political, right reading. The ground covered is enormous; the method is aphorismic. Mr. Pound begins by saying that he is "not trying to condense the encyclopedia into 200 pages"; but there is so much leaping about from topic to topic, and so much eccentric digression within individual topics, that the total effect is that of condensation, and rather improvisatory condensation into the bargain.

No one who cares anything about poetry, ancient or modern, can afford to disregard Mr. Pound's contribution to it both as poet and as critic. I suppose he has a better ear, a subtler, more assured feeling for language, than anyone writing today. Of his scholarship, on the other hand, one can be less sure. The evidences are all too fragmentary: a playing about with Greek phrases in combination with Chinese ideographs; the *ipse-dixit* pronouncements on Greek tragedy in translation (especially the "Agamemnon"; but he might take a look at Louis MacNeice's recent version); above all the familiar use of tags which (as in the case of "Homage to Sextus Propertius" and certain of the "Cantos") suggests the familiarity of uneasiness. And his criticism of painting and music, especially of music, is neither more nor less than clever.

And these add up to a breathless and stimulating book. But it isn't the book that we have been waiting so long for. If only Mr. Pound could forget that it is not necessary to sustain the proud scolding pitch for ever! If he would only forget—for more than ten pages or so—his beloved role of yokel-scarer in the name of Douglas and the Fascist State! Does he want an audience? I should think he would. And no one has more to give an audience. But timidity, or self-consciousness, or something, gets in his way. Then we have the sneers about the profs, the linguistic rough stuff, the bad boy strutting and shocking; and we remember the Duke of Cornwall's remarks on the brusque Kent:

*This is some fellow,*
*Who, having been prais'd for bluntness, doth affect*
*A saucy roughness, and constrains the garb*
*Quite from his nature: he can not flatter, he,*
*An honest mind and plain, he must speak truth:*
*An they will take it, so: if not, he's plain.*

Well, the only kind of person that Mr. Pound cares about—that is worth caring about—will take it, so. It's a pity, though, that his plainness shuts him off from so many others who might be helped.

## Erratum

The correct price of "Captain Horatio Hornblower" is $2.75, not $2.00 as erroneously given in our issue of April 29.

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# Book News from Abroad

A REPORT of the Litfund (literary fund of the Soviet Union) for the year 1938 shows a definite increase in money that is being spent in Russia to make the author comfortable. 11,617,000 rubles were spent on pensions, construction of restrooms and summer resorts as well as actual residences for the writers. 561,000 rubles were spent on medicinal aid. The branches of the organization are spreading all through the autonomous republics and the Ukraine.

The latest work in the U.S.S.R. to get notice is V. Grossman's "Stepan Kolchugin." It deals with the theme that is very popular in Soviet Russia just now: the epos of the Russian worker before the Revolution. The book is written in the Gorki tradition and the main character, the hero's mother, is reminiscent of Gorki's mother.

Black pessimism, induced throughout Europe by the unhappy trend of political events, is finding expression in French literature. Decadence is the motif of many writers who probably will one day be called the "pre-war group," and who are getting an increasingly sympathetic reception from the general public. Macabre delvings in the psyche are evidently in style: witness the award of the Prix Goncourt to Henri Troyat for his "Araignée." Two of the best books in the recent crop are definitely Dostoievskian in character: François Mauriac's "Les Chemins de la Mer," and "Le Mur," a collection of five short stories by Jean Paul Sartre, whose "La Nausée" had created a sensation last year. Mauriac paints against a background of sickening mediocrity a monstrous character who serves as an illustration of his idea of predestination: a man who is innocent yet damned from the start, who against his will is precipitated into crime, who is at once ignoble and immolated. Altogether this character, an insignificant clerk, bids fair to occupy an honorable place in Mauriac's "gallery of monsters." It is probably by way of a subtle comment that Mauriac makes him an attendant spirit of a respectable bourgeois family, hideous with all the bourgeois virtues. Sartre, too, shows himself an adept in the art of realistic grotesque. His five studies in abnormality, ranging from a study of sensations of a man condemned to death to an exceptionally intelligent study of impotence, are full of horrifying inventiveness. There is no question that Sartre is one of France's most interesting "eccentric" writers. Like Céline, he specializes—his field is abnormal psychology, projected into metaphysics.

An aviator's autobiography by an author well known in the United States has recently come out: Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's "Terre des Hommes." A mixture of aviator and moralist, he draws a lesson of heroism from his life in the skies. His conception of life is modeled on that of Nietzsche, or Carlyle, or Emerson: he believes in a class of heroes or supermen—a system more democratic than seems at the first flush.

Jean Giraudoux, best known for his excellent play, "La Guerre de Troie n'Aura pas Lieu," has written one of the most charming escapist novels to appear recently. His "Choix des Elues" is a story of a French family living in California. The wife is bored, escapes, and plunges into a completely unreal adventure that takes up her whole life until she comes back to her husband. It is really a very astute psychological study of a decaying marriage expressed in surrealistic terms. It is, of course, quite escapist in character. Giraudoux's world is a happy one with the sorrows seen vaguely as if through a prism.

A new book is getting an excellent reception in France. Its title is "Autant en Emporte le Vent," by Margaret Mitchell. It was printed in serial form in various magazines: among others the slightly demented *Vendemiaire* and the staid *Revue Hepdomadaire*, and is now published in book form by Gallimard. The criticism has been consistently favorable. The book has been described as one "of the most astonishing works to appear after the war"; it was compared to Tolstoy's "War and Peace" with Scarlett a close rival to the exquisite Natasha.

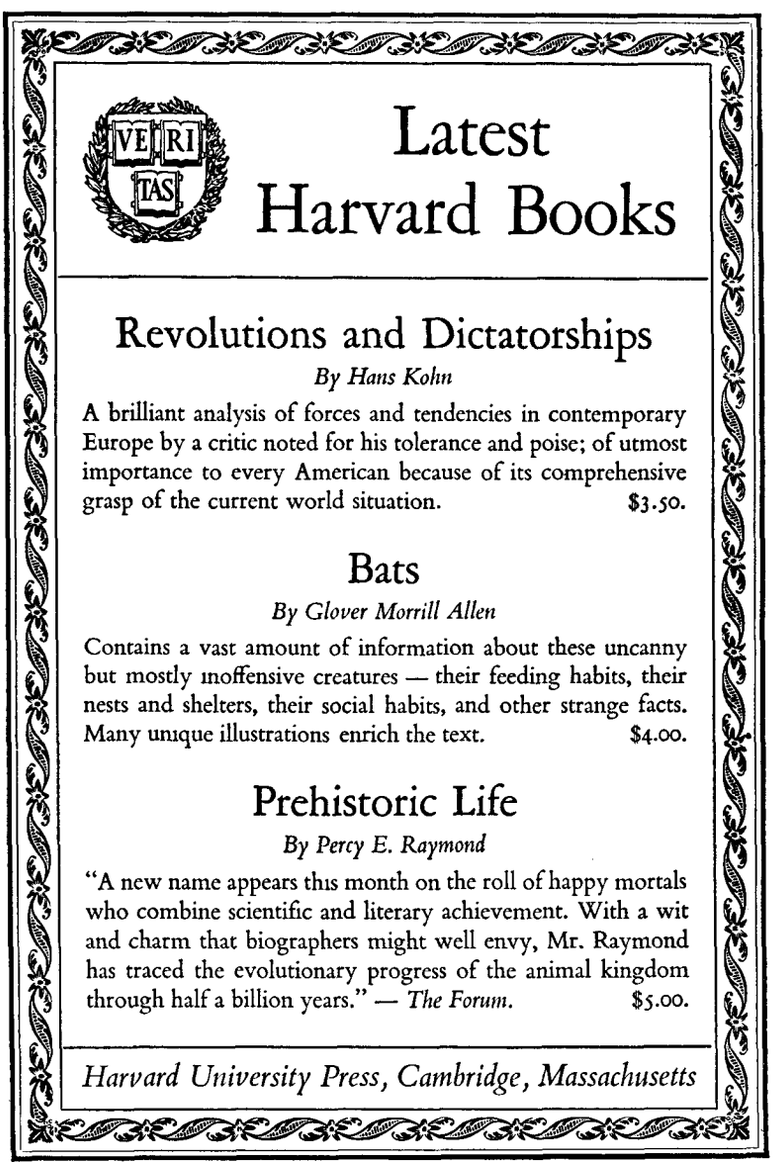
# Age of Enlightenment

*A HISTORY OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND PHILOSOPHY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY. By A. Wolf. New York: The Macmillan Company. 1939. $8.*

Reviewed by MILTON K. MUNITZ

THE value of history, like that of memory for the individual, lies in the material it makes available for a clear understanding of the causes, continuities, and lessons of experience. Professor Wolf's scholarly, detailed, and painstaking account of the advances made in the sciences, mechanical arts, and philosophy during the Age of Reason is especially opportune at the present time when escapism, fanaticism, and barbarism are threatening to neglect or destroy those very enterprises of liberal civilization which the eighteenth century in particular is memorable for having fostered.

That age, as Professor Wolf tells us, was one in which secularism, rationalism, and naturalism conspired to concentrate the energies and thoughts of men upon the problems of a rationally organized worldly life. The tremendous strides which the natural sciences had made in



VE RI TAS
Latest Harvard Books
Revolutions and Dictatorships
By Hans Kohn
A brilliant analysis of forces and tendencies in contemporary Europe by a critic noted for his tolerance and poise; of utmost importance to every American because of its comprehensive grasp of the current world situation. $3.50.
Bats
By Glover Morrill Allen
Contains a vast amount of information about these uncanny but mostly inoffensive creatures — their feeding habits, their nests and shelters, their social habits, and other strange facts. Many unique illustrations enrich the text. $4.00.
Prehistoric Life
By Percy E. Raymond
"A new name appears this month on the roll of happy mortals who combine scientific and literary achievement. With a wit and charm that biographers might well envy, Mr. Raymond has traced the evolutionary progress of the animal kingdom through half a billion years." — The Forum. $5.00.
Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts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the seventeenth century (of which Professor Wolf treated in a previous volume) and which were extended and multiplied in the eighteenth, were a product of the conscious employment of a method that put its emphasis upon the verification of hypotheses through carefully controlled observation. The rejection of dogmatic authority and blind faith which this new procedure involved, began to inspire the adoption of a similar attitude in politics, religion, and morals. The attack upon the divine right of kings, the displacement of Latin by the vernacular, the diffusion of knowledge among the people (although in the eighteenth century, as the author carefully observes, this meant mainly the middle classes), the establishment of public institutions for the encouragement of scientific research, and the publication, among others, of the famous "Encyclopédie" of Diderot and D'Alembert, was each in its own way direct evidence of what consequences such a shift in method and approach entailed.

Professor Wolf's study is valuable not only as a storehouse of well-organized information about the specific achievements realized in mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, demography, medicine, technology, and philosophy, but also as a reminder for us today of how far from realization still is the inspired hope of the Age of Enlightenment that reason may be made to prevail in human affairs, that intolerance, bigotry, and ignorance may be supplanted by their opposites.

## Pathos and Irony

*THE MEDALS AND OTHER STORIES. By Luigi Pirandello. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.* 1939. $2.50.

Reviewed by RICHARD A. CORDELL

THE reader of this volume of posthumous Sicilian sketches, hardly short stories, will understand why Pirandello was almost unknown before his series of post-war metaphysical dramas swept him to world-wide fame. Most of his stories lack the high audacities and subtleties of his comedies, although occasionally there is a flash of the piquant, ironic skepticism that made Pirandello one of the most notable littérateurs of an age in which the concept of Relativity is all-pervading and challenging. Only the first story in this collection, beginning, "It has for a long time been my habit to receive in audience, every Sunday morning, the characters of my future stories," has the provocative four-dimensionalism that distinguishes his plays. There are humor and pathos, and in nearly every sketch a slight charge of irony, but never the ironic stabs that make Maupassant's stories so harrowing.

Of particular interest is "The Mother-in-Law," the story from which Pirandello later fashioned his baffling play, "Right You Are If You Think You Are." Those who have been mystified by the play will find the story quite simple and understandable. Most striking is the final sketch, "My Last Journey," the author's last story, in which, seemingly aware of his approaching death, he says his farewell. Was it premonition or coincidence?

# Reviewing Reviews

## "The Grapes of Wrath" by John Steinbeck

THE most impressive thing about the reviews of John Steinbeck's new novel is their approach to unanimity. No one can complain that "The Grapes of Wrath" has received less than its due (though a few minority reporters may feel that it has received considerably more). "If any book published this year deserves the trite word 'great,' this is it," writes Lewis Gannett in the *New York Herald Tribune;* and "great" is used without qualification by a score of other reviewers, notably Dorothy Parker in the *Book Union Bulletin* ("It is not a decent thing," she writes, "to toss the word 'great' about . . . . I have known it to be tossed to Mr. Booth Tarkington, to Mr. Hervey Allen, to Miss Edna Ferber, and to, so help me, Miss Margaret Mitchell. . . . ") Even *Time,* which calls Steinbeck "a writer, still, of great promise," goes on to say that "this novel's big audience of readers will likely find in it one of the most impassioned and exciting books of the year."

Variety among the reviews comes largely by way of minor disagreements. These are on two points: the interpolated non-fiction passages throughout the novel; and the final scene, which, wrote Lewis Gannett, "is likely to be the most discussed book incident of the year." As to the interpolated passages, Joseph Henry Jackson in the *Herald Tribune Books* votes yea ("the undercurrent of the book is announced, spoken as a running accompaniment to the story, with something of the effect of the sound track in Pare Lorentz's 'The River' "), and so does Charles Lee in the *Boston Herald.* Across the fence sits Lewis Gannett ("I am not sure that the story gains by the forthright auctorial pronouncement"), Louis Kronenberger ("It is a superb tract . . . by virtue of living scenes and living characters . . . not by virtue of discursive homilies"), *Time,* Harry Hansen in the *World-Telegram,* and the *SRL.*

As to the final scene, Harry Hansen writes: "We will remember ["The Grapes of Wrath"] for the courage of Ma, the resolute fight of the boys and for episodes like that which closes the book, when Rose of Sharon appeases the hunger of the starving man in the primitive way that mammals have in common the world over." "The most memorable scene is the last one," said Charles Poore in the *N. Y. Times.* Clifton Fadiman, however, called this scene "the tawdriest kind of fake symbolism"; Peter Monro Jack, "a minor and sentimental note"; the *SRL,* "bathos." (Curiously, the *Providence Journal* referred to the final episode as "banal," which seems hardly the *mot juste* from any point of view.)

Very few reviewers mistook the language of the characters for obscenity. "Epic realism here, to the limit," said the *Toronto Daily Star;* "and about 100 pages of sheer juvenile indecency, too primitive to be artistic." And J. S. Pope wrote in *The Atlanta Journal:* "It is full of little words you never saw printed in respectable works. By comparison, 'Tobacco Road' is something like a fourth-grade exercise in pure English."

Some reviewers regarded "The Grapes of Wrath" as an economic tract rather than a novel, and wrote polemics instead of reviews. *The Springfield Republican,* for instance, contributes a column of economic argument, with this peroration: "Not all propaganda is condemnable or undesirable, yet all propaganda, no matter upon what side, must be suspect, since it can so easily degenerate from reasoned consideration and straightforward discussion into insidious disingenuousness, the zealotry of crusading, and rabid agitation. Propaganda that involves direct or indirect incitement to passion or violence . . . contributes nothing toward the reasoning out and solving of our social and economic problems." One might well ask to what manifestation of violence "The Grapes of Wrath" incites its readers: possibly against reviewers who misunderstand the book? Also by what rule of esthetics is a novel obliged to solve the problems it states? Richmond Croom Beatty in the *Nashville Banner* writes portentously: "A book should be discussed in terms of its own frame of reference. So considered, one is forced to conclude that [Steinbeck's] tragic sense is distorted and, therefore, unreal. The only type of calamity which seems consistently to interest him is that of the unequal distribution of poverty. . . . But tragedy in this world, it appears, is unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately—no particular destiny of any single economic class." (Very true, Mr. Beatty, but you said you were going to discuss "The Grapes of Wrath" in its own frame of reference.) Still more unaccountable is a passage from *The Providence Journal:* "John Steinbeck is a highly talented and highly serious creative writer. From the beginning he has written precisely what he wanted to write, precisely as he wanted to write it. He has made no compromises with the popular tastes represented by the slick magazines and by Hollywood. Nor do I think he has now. The failure of 'The Grapes of Wrath,' as I see it, is a failure of taste."

We quote in conclusion the opening sentences of Randolph Bartlett's review in the New York *Sun.* "It would be extremely gratifying to be able to dismiss John Steinbeck's new novel, 'The Grapes of Wrath,' as amorphous in construction, loose in style, and nauseating in matter. Unfortunately, while this statement is true, the book has something more, which commands attention, if not affection or respect. The reader finds himself in the position of the bird hypnotized by the snake—he hates it but he cannot tear himself away from it. If this be praise, make the most of it." One would have to go as far in space as England and as far in time as the nineteenth century to find a comparable example of misplaced condescension.

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# The New Books

## Biography

*THERE IS NO RETURN. By Philip Jordan. Harpers.* 1939. $3.

Philip Jordan of the London *News-Chronicle* is distinguished among correspondents by an extraordinary power of writing that seems more to be expected of a novelist than a newspaper man. Hemingway has it, of course, and Dos Passos, who necessarily inject their professional drama into journalism; and Jordan's style is very much that of Dos Passos, though leaner and without the nervous twitching of his prose. With these unrelated vignettes of a sweating, drinking, and dreaming thirty-five-year-old career, Jordan has produced an uneven book, part of it as exciting and beautiful as anything of the sort we have recently had, and part of it of no more consequence than the quick political portraits and air flight descriptions, the misty memoirs and opinions it contains.

Traveling in the war areas of Spain, he saw men slowly hammering crucifixes to bits, and because he was bored he learned to plough with the peasants who had too much to do to watch the planes overhead. "They sounded like a face-massage machine flapping over the skin near your ears." He talked with the medley of men of the International Brigade who were holding the trenches near Teruel, and he saw death as close as his nose. He climbed to Adam's Peak in Ceylon among Buddhists, Mohammedans, Hindus, and Nestorian Christians, to each of whom the giant footprint at the top was his own saint's sign. Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkmann in St. Tropez showed him the excitement of philately, and Isadora Duncan danced for him alone.

Amazing men have peopled the life of Philip Jordan, and great scenes have framed them. The promises of his chapter headings are not always upheld in the tales to follow, but the prime writing and the keen vision make his book noteworthy.

H. D.

## Fiction

*QUARTET. By Emil Ludwig. Alliance Book Corporation.* 1939. $3.

Having devoted his labors to the study of titans human and elemental, from Napoleon to the Nile, it seems natural enough that Emil Ludwig should divert himself now with a light novel. "Quartet" is set in an idyllic private little world hidden somewhere in a lake, in the shadow of the Alps; those rumors of modern history that penetrate to it are filtered of their violence and retain only the quality of harmless echoes. Here the quartet live, two couples, a writer, a painter, and their wives. The title has a larger significance than that, a musical one, for these four trace a devious pattern very much like that of a string quartet, weaving through the story in varied combinations, changing partners or dividing into sexes, all variations upon the theme: love.

For this, when we have peeled away the layers of banter and speculation, clever talk, soliloquy, is an erotic novel, thoroughly insulated against any mature considerations. Not even Ludwig's abundance of witty commentary and romantic dialogue can obscure the fact that—well, love is not enough. Even writers and painters think of others things, and when they do they are marked by the quality of their thoughts. Manfred the writer, for example, is presented as a famous author of plays, poems, biographies,—something like Ludwig, as a matter of fact. When we observe him tossing off such remarks as this one: "Of course, it was the search for pleasure that drove me on, just as our dictators are driven by no other desire than to heighten their existence,"—we suspect his books of being no great shakes. The fact is that the characters of "Quartet" don't amount to very much, and we may content ourselves with being amused at their antics, as Ludwig undoubtedly did in writing of them.

N. L. R.

*TOUCH AND GO. By Victoria Berne. Harpers.* 1939. $2.

There is very little touch and still less go about this self-consciously airy novel which at its best suggests G. B. Stern in one of her less matriarchal moods. The background is the Switzerland of the pension, of the ugly wall-paper and the potted begonia, of the idle uprooted exile. The plot is the effort of a nice girl, rescued by his death from an insipid husband, to find herself another man; failing to seduce a mountain-climber and rejecting the honest attentions of a peasant, she succeeds with a German emigré. The most exciting event is an epidemic of measles.

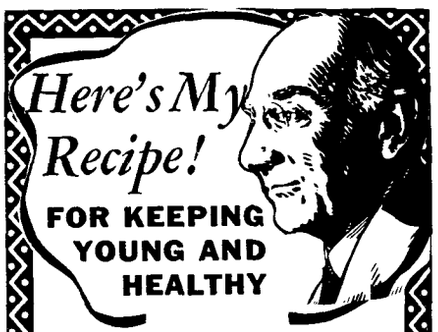
K. S.

*MRS. PENNINGTON. By Katharine Carson. Putnam.* 1939. $2.50.

Ten years ago the average American first novel was usually a thinly disguised autobiography. The law of diminishing returns hit the autobiographical novel coincidentally with the depression; and during the thirties first novelists have tended to go back a generation or two for their material. They have evolved a type which may be called, for want of a better term, the ancestor novel. These have come largely out of the South and the Middle West, and have contributed to the exfoliation of regional fiction.

"Mrs. Pennington" is a good, solid, readable example of the ancestor novel, the story of a Kansas family in the late eighties. Mrs. Pennington is one of those New Englanders who went West with plenty of courage but little money; her job is to do her best with four children in late adolescence, keep them from marrying the wrong people, and protect them, when they get into scrapes, from her husband, whose business failure has ruined his disposition. Much of the action

(*Continued on next page*)


The New Book

BY

VICTOR HEISER

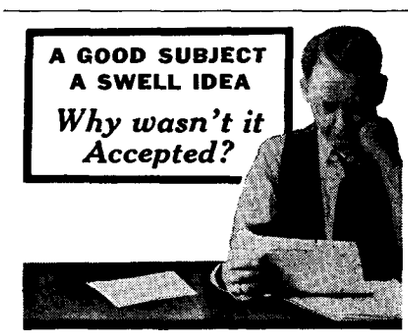
AUTHOR OF

*An American Doctor's Odyssey*

"Crammed with advice and good stories, too. What is particularly valuable is that the directions for keeping well are accompanied by simple and often fascinating accounts of the biological reasons. In his explanation of how the body works, Dr. Heiser is the ideal popularizer."—HENRY SEIDEL CANBY, in the *Book-of-the-Month Club News.* $2.50

YOU'RE THE DOCTOR

NORTON




FICTION WRITING SELF-TAUGHT

By Arthur Sullivant Hoffman

Shows you the secret of successful fiction and how to use it

WHY is it that editors turn down stories with new angles or ideas on subjects in demand? Why do other writers reworking stale material get their stories accepted? In FICTION WRITING SELF-TAUGHT, a successful magazine editor and teacher shows you. Starting from the initial step of choosing a basis, he takes you through every stage of story production, revealing trade secrets and pointing out how to eliminate the weaknesses that cause editors to reject your manuscripts. Send for this book today; you'll find it an indispensable tool throughout your career. Postpaid, $1.75. W. W. Norton & Co., 70 Fifth Ave., New York.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## The New Books

(*Continued from preceding page*)

takes place during Chautauqua week, and Mrs. Pennington keeps the family on the rails during all the excitement. Her character, tolerant and sympathetic, gives a warmth to the various episodes which are otherwise too superficial and familiar to be of much narrative interest. The novel has neither the originality nor the penetration that would give it real distinction, but its homespun sincerity is genuine.

G. S.

*THE RUNAWAY. By Kathleen Norris. Doubleday, Doran. 1939. $2.*

The list of Kathleen Norris's novels lengthens with the seasons and yet she seems to retain not only her ability to produce more but also her enthusiasm for doing so. She builds up her plots with as much vigor as ever, she paints in her settings with the same eye for detail, and she is apparently just as fond of her characters as she was when she knew them less well. For they are the same people and they suffer almost the same ills and receive almost the same rewards under whatever title they appear, the willful and lovely young girls who insist upon following their own stars into disaster when the compass of their elders' experience lies waiting to their hands.

The runaway is another of these girls. Growing up in comfortable circumstances on the family ranch in Southern California she falls in love, not wisely but too quickly, with a handsome young man who appears out of the wider world which she so longs to know. A hasty marriage results in the inevitable consequences to Norris heroines, a baby and a husband who is content to loaf and gamble and borrow his way through life. After sacrifice and hardship and a slow winning to independence on the young wife's part, fate relents and removes the encumbering husband in time to make a really happy ending possible. The artificial outlines of the story do not prevent the warmth of Mrs. Norris's feeling for people, her uncanny rightness with domestic detail, and her appetite for life in general, from making the novel bright with the momentary actuality which has given her work popularity with the very types of whom she writes.

G. G.

★ ★
LETTER
TO A
COMRADE
By JOY DAVIDMAN
In the Yale series of younger poets
Edited by Stephen Vincent Benét
"There is sharp protest and rugged expression in these poems and there is also delicacy—nothing could be more delicate than the poignant lines of 'Snow in Madrid.'" *Hartford Times.*
Second Printing. $2.00
YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS
New Haven, Connecticut
★ ★

*THE CROWN. By Elisabeth Bergstrand-Poulsen. Coward-McCann. 1939. $2.50.*

A Swedish warrior had brought back from the Russian wars a great lustrous chandelier, made of rock crystal and a white metal more precious than gold. Designed for an emperor's palace and hardly appropriate to a rustic manor house, it was finally bequeathed to the parish church under conditions which bound the congregation to the perpetual upkeep of the old warrior's family burial plot. It was the church's chief and only ornament, to the peasant mind a magnificent symbol of God's glory. With the passage of years its presence was taken for granted; the family graves became overgrown with weeds and moss, the iron railings corroded with rust. When such carelessness could no longer be condoned, the representative of the family stepped in and, to the shame of pastor and flock, removed the splendid crown which had too easily become the pride of the village. The loss was a catastrophe, but it inspired the simple and lovely Serafia Cavall to an extended penance which would insure the chandelier's return. Beautifully faithful to her self-appointed task, she toiled through the years, surmounted obstacle after obstacle, only to die before she had fulfilled her mission. But her seraphic daughter took over the obligation, and with a perseverance that matched her mother's achieved the goal. The lustrous crown sparkled once more in the chancel.

Out of this devotional myth Mrs. Bergstrand-Poulsen has built a novel that is remarkable for its sincerity and its directness. It has the solemnity, the simplicity, and the fervor of a medieval saint's legend, but the mysticism is of a dogged Protestant variety that owes its strength to the rigors of the peasant's life. There is nothing mawkish, sentimental, or ethereal about her characters. They are as real and as solid as the soil which provides their living. Even the saintly Serafia is human and vital. In her native Sweden Mrs. Bergstrand-Poulsen is likened to Selma Lägerlof, and the comparison is not unjust—but it should be added that she has something too of the ruggedness and the earthiness of her fellow Scandinavian Knut Hamsun.

C. D. A.

## Miscellaneous

*ODYSSEY OF AN AMERICAN FAMILY: An Account of the Roosevelts and Their Kin as Travelers, from 1613 to 1938. By Hall Roosevelt in collaboration with Samuel Duff McCoy. Harpers. 1939. $3.75.*

The Roosevelt family, somewhere back two or three hundred years ago, developed an itching foot. It is hereditary. This wanderlust of the Roosevelts has taken them all over the earth. It has given them the spirit of adventure, and the journeys all over the globe of this adventurous spirit is the subject of Hall Roosevelt's book. It is most interesting and delightful. Apparently anyone whose children or grandchildren were preparing in another generation to marry into the Roosevelt family were again acquiring also this itching foot, and the blood of adventure goes pouring into modern Roosevelts, particularly Eleanor, Hall, and Franklin of this generation, in a gorgeous stream. The account of these Rooseveltian and near-Rooseveltian adventures, as set down by Mr. Hall Roosevelt, makes an adventure book comparable to any adventure story of modern times. As a key to the conduct of the Roosevelts of this generation, the book has its special value. Incidentally, it is charmingly written.

W. A. W.

# The Criminal Record

### The Saturday Review's Guide to Detective Fiction

| *Title and Author* | *Crime, Place, Sleuth* | *Summing Up* | *Verdict* |
|---|---|---|---|
| SEND ANOTHER COFFIN<br>*F. G. Presnell*<br>(Morrow: $2.) | Dauntless Mid-western lawyer defies politicos, police, and gangdom in search for slayer of ex-secretary and female client. | Intricate, hard-boiled, outspoken, and pungently amusing saga of murder and graft. Jells too quickly at end—but what of it? | A1—and saucy |
| SECRET AGENT IN AFRICA<br>*Rupert Grayson*<br>(Dutton: $2.) | Gunston Cotton and wife, at behest of British Secret Service, go to South Africa and run down German-engineered conspiracy. | Long-winded but occasionally exciting thriller of nasty, sneering Huns, true-blue Britishers, and a sultry lass named Carnation. | Rather tough trekking |
| MURDER ON STILTS<br>*Gregory Dean*<br>(Hillman-Curl: $2.) | Rich occupant of bizarre Riverside Drive eyrie found murdered in hermetically sealed room. Dept. Commish Simon and myrmidons solve it. | Carefully constructed and rather fatiguing yarn of family with horrid pasts, and of killer snared by his own efficiency. | Average |
| THE CORPSE HANGS HIGH<br>*Edward Ronns*<br>(Phoenix: $2.) | Reginald "Beauty" Black, clean-up man for Jersey coast resort, clambers over mounds of corpses to unravel Milk Fund racketry. | Whole armories of gats, rich assortment of "hoods," brutal cops, murderous ladies, double-crossers, and other tasty bits. | Help! |

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# Trade Winds

BY P. E. G. QUERCUS

AFTER supping too lavishly on Italian spiced meatballs Old Q. woke up with heartburn and sirocco. ☞He wondered, in his borborigmus, whether that was the way Fascism started? ☞We like the Buick's new slogan, "It's got its jeans on under its party clothes." ☞And that reminds us that Trade Winds too ought to work in more facts. ☞A book of practical religion and good citizenship, which the publishers say is doing very well, is Max Siegel's *Boys' Club* (Houghton Mifflin). ☞Occasionally we get inquiry about the old Hoboken rathskeller singing game *Schnitzelbank*. The words and pictures of this ancient Teutoburger revel can be had on an oilcloth chart from the Pennsylvania Dutch Cook Book Publishers, 14 N. 6 Street, Reading, Pa. ☞Among enviable postcards sent us by subscribers on vacation we are specially pleased by a photo of Gilbert White's village of Selborne, of which we had had no mental visualization. ☞Always enjoyed Whittier's: "Surrey hills to mountains grew In White of Selborne's loving view." ☞One of the finest books of this year, and for which we covet the success it deserves, will be St. Exupéry's *Wind, Sand and The Stars*. St. Exupéry is the Conrad of the air-oceans. ☞The Cambridge University Press marked April 20, 1939, as the completion of a 43-year job, which grew to 32 volumes and nearly 12½ million words of text (not reckoning bibliographies, prefaces, indexes, etc.). This is the great series of the Cambridge Histories (Ancient, Medieval, and Modern).

☞Harcourt, Brace and Company announce that F. V. Morley, who has been for a number of years a director of Faber and Faber, publishers in London, will return to this country in July and join Harcourt Brace as a director and head of the trade editorial department. Mr. Morley is a younger brother of Christopher Morley of the *S. R. L.* and Felix Morley, editor of the Washington *Post*. He has been connected with publishing in London ever since completing his Rhodes Scholarship in 1922; before joining Faber and Faber he was representative in London of the Century Company. ☞An announcement only too significant of the times comes from the N. Y. Public Library. As an economy measure the Library will have to close all the special-subject reading rooms in the Main Building after 6 p.m. on weekdays and all day on Sundays. This retrenchment will begin June 1st. The Reference Department of the Library, to which these special reading rooms belong, is supported by private endowment. If its services are to continue as before, increased funds are essential. ☞Howard Lederer reports additional features for the A. B. A. Convention: a speech by Edna Ferber at the luncheon May 15, and a new dance-step, *The Booksellers Walk* (can't afford to ride?) by Arthur Murray at the banquet.

. ☞Our favorite publisher's note this week comes from the Dial Press: "Benedict Thielen, novelist and short story writer, whose summer home near New Bedford, Mass., was blown nearly 300 yards from its foundation and set down on someone else's land during the hurricane last fall, has left New York to buy the property on which his house now stands." ☞William Morrow & Co.'s new detective story writer, F. G. Presnell (*Send Another Coffin*) knows how to write a good hardboiled yarn without its getting tedious or offensive. The setting of his tale sounds like Columbus, Ohio.

☞When Old Q. drives up into New England he likes to stop at the Farmington (Conn.) Bookshop. Miss Scarth, the proprietor, uses a portrait of a bust of Alexander Pope as the emblem of the shop. ☞The June selection of the Readers' Union (a book club in England) is an anthology of the work of James Thurber. ☞The course in Professional Writing offered by the University of Oklahoma (under the supervision of Prof. W. S. Campbell, "Stanley Vestal") sounds so efficient and intelligent, whether taken in person or by correspondence, that we are tempted to refer to it many applicants who wish that kind of information and training.

☞The Limited Editions Club is now sending out the first volumes of their 37-volume folio edition of Shakespeare. Edited by Herbert Farjeon and designed by Bruce Rogers, "it aims to be the sort of text which might have been printed in the First Folio if Shakespeare had read the proofs." ☞The question whether Shakespeare had the temperament to be a good proofreader is fascinating to us. ☞This remarkable achievement in book-design may be examined by visitors at the office of the Limited Editions Club, 595 Madison Avenue. ☞Our valued correspondent John Allison writes from Osaka, Japan, that 1938 was a banner year for the Nipponese publishing business. According to official figures "60,000,000 books and magazines were printed during the year, showing a 20 percent increase over 1937. The figures show that there has been a growing demand for books on military affairs, economics, medical sciences and industry, while there was a decreasing call for books on philosophy, education, literature and art. While it is true there has been a decrease in the fields of so-called 'pure' literature, the two best selling works at present do come in that field. The book with the largest circulation just at present, is *Wheat and Soldiers* by Ashikei Hino, a sergeant with the Japanese forces in China, who has almost literally 'told all' regarding a soldier's life and loves and hopes, to say nothing of his discomforts and doubts. The book has sold 7,000,000 copies to date. Some time in December the Sunday New York *Times* published a brief résumé of the novel. Running a close second to this, is an edition in modern Japanese of *Genji Monogatari*, what we know as the *Tale of Genji* translated by Arthur Waley. This famous old work, as you know, was written during the Heian Period (794-1192) and this is the first time a complete translation has been made into the modern colloquial language. The masses are eating it up."

☞Cyril Clemens quotes to us an interesting letter from John Masefield speaking of the unusual likeness between Mark Twain and the late A. H. Bullen, publisher and scholar and connoisseur of Elizabethan verse. Masefield wrote "I never saw Mark Twain, but judging from photographs the likeness must have been close. More than once, when walking with Bullen in London, I have heard people say, 'There's Mark Twain.' "

## Book Exhibits in South America

☞About thirty publishers in this country, under the direction of Dr. Ben M. Cherrington of the State Department, have organized a unique, non-commercial Good Neighbor Gesture in the form of three exhibitions of 2500 books each, to be shown in Buenos Aires, Montevideo, and Rio de Janeiro this summer. In South America the exhibitions will be under the jurisdiction of local committees composed of the U. S. Ambassador and representatives of the individual governments. After the exhibits are over, the books are to remain as gifts of the American publishers to the three South American nations.

☞Although books dealing with various aspects of North American life will be especially featured, the exhibits will also cover many branches of the arts and sciences, and the advice of the American Library Association has been called upon in arranging the specific programs. The publishers are sending Mr. Henry M. Snyder as observer and unofficial representative during the period of the exhibits, in June, July, and August.


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## PERSONALS

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# Coming

**in next week's Saturday Review**

- **Stephen Vincent Benét on the making of an American opera from his story, "The Devil and Daniel Webster."**
- **The full details about the World's Fair speeches and meetings of the International P.E.N. Congress, reported by Henry Seidel Canby.**
- **Elmer Davis's essay-review of the Beards' "America in Midpassage."**
- **And many other features and reviews.**

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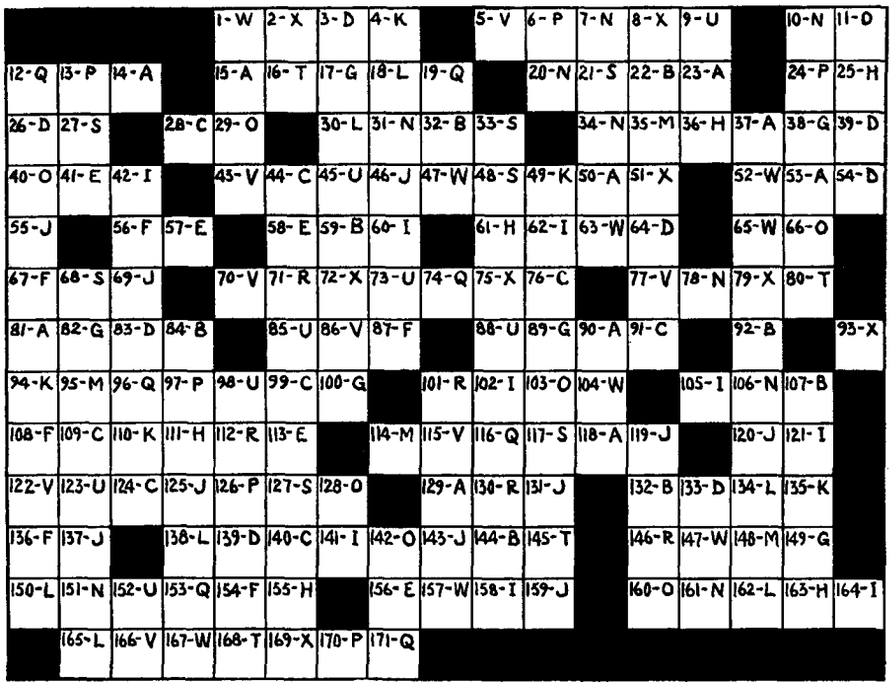
# Double-Crostics: No. 268

By ELIZABETH S. KINGSLEY




**DIRECTIONS**

*To solve this puzzle, you must guess twenty-four words, the definitions of which are given in the column headed DEFINITIONS. The letters in each word to be guessed are numbered. These numbers appear under the dashes in the column headed WORDS. There is a dash for each letter in the required word. The key letters in the squares are for convenience, indicating to which word in the definitions each letter in the diagram belongs. When you have guessed a word, fill it in on the dashes; then write each letter in the correspondingly numbered square on the puzzle diagram. When the squares are all filled in you will find (by reading from left to right) a quotation from a famous author. Reading up and down the letters mean nothing. The black squares indicate ends of words; therefore words do not necessarily end at the right side of the diagram.*

*When the column headed WORDS is filled in, the initial letters spell the name of the author and the title of the piece from which the quotation has been taken. Authority for spelling and definitions is Webster's New International Dictionary (second edition).*

The solution of last week's *Double Crostic* will be found on page 16 of this issue.

**DEFINITIONS**

A. Noisy, clamorous, talkative person.

B. Houseboat used on the Nile.

C. Rudimentary sensation.

D. White aromatic wine.

E. Piece of gossip.

F. Mother of Prometheus.

G. Indolent; useless.

H. Reckless.

I. Sick person.

J. Revoking.

K. Rich peasant in Russia.

L. Mimic or burlesque (2 wds.).

M. Austrian composer (1860-1903).

N. English novelist (1805-82).

O. Undignified (2 wds.) (colloq.).

P. Not in the least.

Q. Son of David.

R. Swiss poet and philosopher (1821-81).

S. Poem by Wordsworth, in "Lyrical Ballads" (1800).

T. Boy's short-visored cap.

U. Reduce to uniformity.

V. Gilbert & Sullivan opera.

W. Third International.

X. Intensity factor of chemical energy.

**WORDS**

15 90 118 50 81 37 23 129 14 53

107 92 59 22 132 32 144 84

140 91 44 109 124 76 28 99

26 64 3 139 133 54 83 39

57 41 113 156 58

56 67 154 87 136 108

17 38 82 89 100 149

36 25 155 61 163 111

105 60 42 141 62 158 102 121 164

46 55 137 143 120 131 69 159 125 119

135 94 49 110 4

30 138 18 162 134 165 150

114 35 95 148

7 78 106 34 10 151 161 20 31

40 29 66 11 128 103 142 160

97 170 6 24 126 13

19 116 96 12 153 74 171

71 101 130 112 146

33 68 127 21 48 27 117

80 168 16 145

152 45 88 73 123 98 9 85

166 86 77 122 70 5 115 43

167 65 1 147 157 52 104 63 47

2 79 93 8 75 169 72 51

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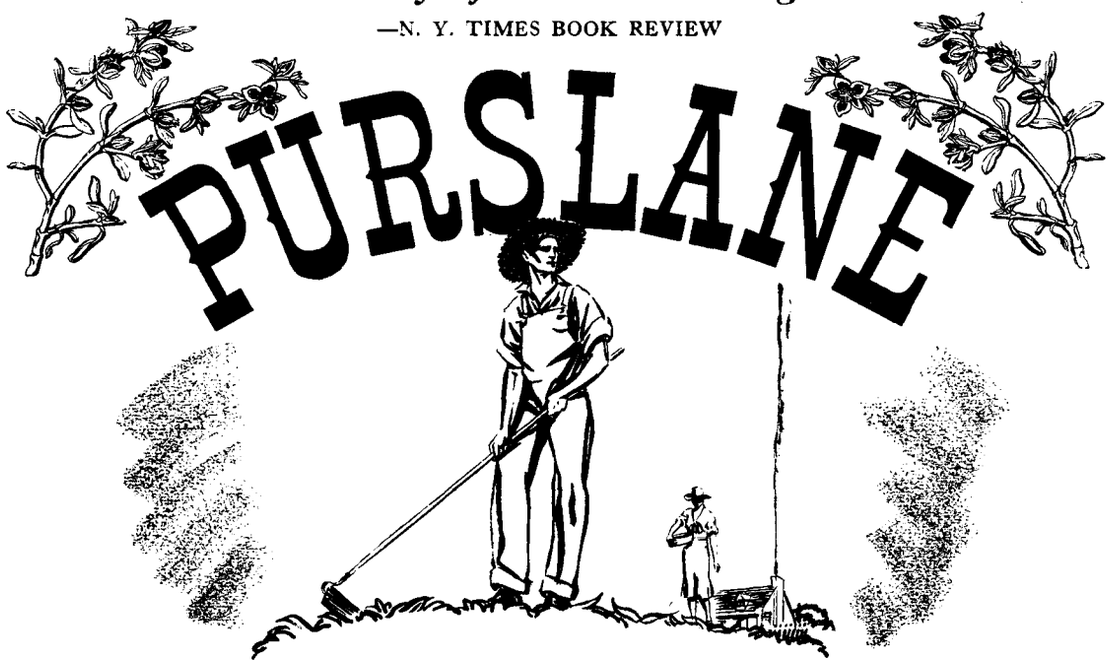


## *by* BERNICE KELLY HARRIS

PURSLANE *("pusley")* is an annual, used sometimes as a pot herb and for salads. . . . Found everywhere, always underfoot, it is considered a weed by some, yet it has a distinctive quality, a flavor that sets it apart. Vigorous, with many homely virtues, earthy, vital, pretty, mean as the devil about crowding cultivated plants, kicked about a lot—but living on! How like country folks themselves is purslane.

We tell you this only because it may help you to understand why Bernice Kelly Harris called her first novel by this name. The people of PURSLANE (the novel) are the kind of people you'll find almost everywhere throughout rural America, or would have before the radio's spurious "hill-billies" made them self-conscious, and before the auto annihilated the distinction between country and town.

The Fullers and their "kinfolks" live in a little, closely-knit community of the middle Carolinas. They are neither poor nor rich; they are neither poor whites nor aristocrats. Their houses are comfortable farm-houses, neither hovels nor mansions. Their farms are real farms. They work hard, live hard, fear God; they are born, amuse themselves, court, marry, die in their own way. And it is a good way. They are the kind of people who—by and large—made America what it is.

Such a community is the "material" of this novel. It is not a usual novel by any means. There is no "plot" in the ordinary sense, although there is a love story as moving and as poignant as any you have known. This novel is the stuff of life, not as novelists imagine it, but as people live it.

Some parts of PURSLANE may shock you, because these people are so thoroughly innocent that they say what they think. Some of it is delightfully funny. And all of it is fascinating and true. We think PURSLANE will find an instant welcome in the hearts of discriminating readers, especially those readers of *The Saturday Review* who read (and liked) "The Yearling," or Frederic Vandewater's "A Home in the Country," or (to go farther back) Ed Howe's "The Story of a Country Town." We'll go even farther, and say that for many PURSLANE will bring much the same nostalgic emotion as their recollection of "Huckleberry Finn" or "Life on the Mississippi."

PURSLANE has just been published by The University of North Carolina Press. Get it, and read it, if you care for "something special," and quite off the beaten track, in fiction. Price $2.50.

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